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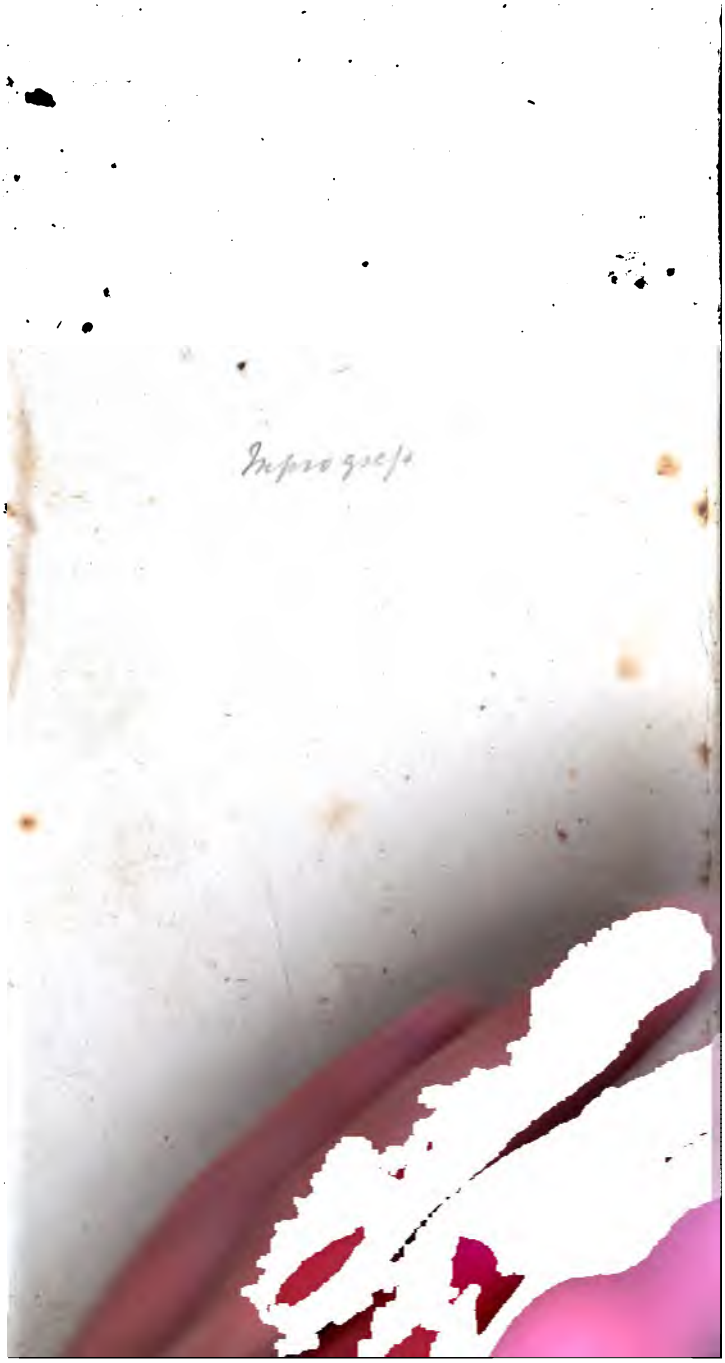

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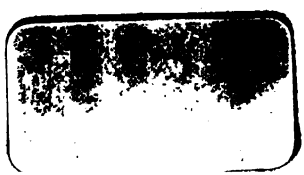

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ON

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

BY

THE RIGHT REV.

JOSEPH HALL, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF EXETER AND OF NORWICH.

WITH SOME

ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE AND SUFFERINGS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTEMPLATIONS

ON THE PRINCIPAL PASSAGES IN THE

HOLY STORY.

BOOK XIV.

SAUL IN DAVID'S CAVE.

It was the strange lot of David, that those whom he pursued preserved him from those whom he had preserved. The Philistines, whom David had newly smitten in Keilah, call off Saul from smiting David in the wilderness, when there was but a hillock betwixt him and death.

Wicked purposes are easily checked, not easily broken off. Saul's sword is scarce dry from the blood of the Philistines, when it thirsts anew for the blood of David; and now, in a renewed chase, hunts him dry-foot through every wilderness. The very desert is too fair a refuge for innocence. The hills and rocks are searched in an angry jealousy. The very wild goats of the mountains were not allowed to be companions for him, which had no fault but his virtue. Oh the seemingly-unequal distribution of these earthly things! Cruelty and oppression reign in a palace, while goodness lurks among the rocks and caves, and thinks it happiness enough to steal a life.

Like a dead man, David is fain to be hid under the earth; and seeks the comfort of protection in darkness: and now the wise providence of God leads Saul to his enemy, without blood. He, which before brought them within a hill's distance without interview, brings them now both within one roof; so as that while Saul seeks David and finds him not, he is found of David unsought. If Saul had known his own opportunities, how David and his men had interred themselves, he had saved a treble labor,

of chase, of execution, and burial; for had he but stopped the mouth of that cave, his enemies had laid themselves down in their own graves. The wisdom of God thinks fit to hide from evil men and spirits, those means and seasons, which might be, if they had been taken, most prejudicial to his own. We had been oft foiled, if Satan could but have known our hearts. Sometimes we lie open to evils, and happy it is for us that he only knows it, which pities instead of tempting us.

It is not long since Saul said of David, lodged then in Keilah, 'God hath delivered him into mine hands; for he is shut in, seeing he is come into a city that hath gates and bars;' but now, contrarily, God delivers Saul, ere he was aware, into the hands of David; and, without the help of gates and bars, hath enclosed him within the valley of death. How just is it with God, that those who seek mischief to others find it to themselves; and, even while they are spreading nets, are ensnared. Their deliberate plotting of evil is surprised with a sudden judgment.

How amazedly must David needs look, when he saw Saul enter into the cave, where himself was! 'What is this,' thinks he, 'which God hath done? Is this presence purposed, or casual? Is Saul here to pursue, or to tempt me?' Where, suddenly, the action bewrays the intent; and tells David, that Saul sought secresy, and not him. The superfluity of his maliciousness brought him into the wilderness; the necessity of nature led him into the cave: even those actions wherein we place shame, are not exempted from a providence.

The fingers of David's followers itched to seize on their master's enemy; and, that they might not seem led so much by faction as by faith, they urge David with a promise from God; 'The day is come, whereof the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, and thou shalt do to him, as it shall seem good to thee.' This argument seemed to carry such command with it, as that David not only may but must imbrue his hands in blood, unless he will be found wanting to God and himself. Those temptations are most powerful, which fetch their force from the pretence of a religious obedience; whereas those, which are raised from arbitrary and private respects, admit of an easy dispensation.

If there were such a prediction, one clause of it was ambiguous; and they take it at the worst. 'Thou shalt do to him, as shall seem good to thee:' that might not seem good to him, which seemed evil to God. There is nothing more dangerous, than to make construction of God's purposes out of eventual appearances. If carnal probabilities might be the rule of our judgment, what could God seem to intend other than Saul's death, in offering him naked into the hands of those whom he unjustly persecuted? How could David's soldiers think, that God had sent Saul thither on any other errand, than to fetch his bane? And if Saul could have seen his own danger, he had given himself for dead; for his heart, guilty to his own bloody desires, could not but have expected the same measure which it meant. But wise and holy David, not transported either with misconceit of the event, or fury of passion, or solicitation of his followers, dares make no other use of this accident, than the trial of his loyalty and the inducement of his peace. It had been as easy for him, to cut the throat of Saul as his garment; but now his coat only shall be the worse, not his person: neither doth he in this maiming of a cloak seek his own revenge, but a monument of his innocence. Before, Saul rent Samuel's garment; now, David cutteth Saul's: both were significant: the rending of the one, signified the kingdom torn out of those unworthy hands; the cutting of the other, that the life of Saul might have been as easily cut off.

Saul needs no other monitor of his own danger, than what he wears. The garment of Saul was laid aside, while he went to cover his feet; so as the cut of the garment did not threaten any touch of the body: yet even the violence offered to a remote garment strikes the heart of David, which finds a present remorse, for harmfully touching that which did once touch the person of his master. Tender consciences are moved to regret at those actions, which strong hearts pass over with a careless ease. It troubled not Saul to seek after the blood of a righteous servant. There is no less difference of consciences than stomachs: some stomachs will digest the hardest meats, and turn over substances not in their nature edible, while others

surfeit of the lightest food, and complain even of dainties. Every gracious heart is in some measure scrupulous, and finds more safety in fear, than in presumption; and if it be so strait, as to curb itself in from the liberty which it might take in things which are not unlawful, how much less will it dare to take scope unto evil! By how much that state is better, where nothing is allowed, than where all things; by so much is the strict and timorous conscience better than the lawless. There is good likelihood of that man, which is any way scrupulous of his ways; but he, which makes no bones of his actions, is apparently hopeless.

Since David's followers pleaded God's testimony to him as a motive to blood, David appeals to the same God for his preservation from blood; 'The Lord keep me from doing that thing to my master, the Lord's anointed.' And now the good man hath work enough, to defend both himself and his persecutor; himself, from the importunate necessity of doing violence, and his master, from suffering it. It was not more easy to rule his own hands, than difficult to rule a multitude. David's troop consisted of malcontents; all that were in distress, in debt, in bitterness of soul, were gathered to him. Many, if never so well ordered, are hard to command; a few, if disorderly, more hard; many and disorderly, must needs be so much the hardest of all, that David never achieved any victory like unto this, wherein he first overcame himself, then his soldiers.

And what was the charm, wherewith David allayed those raging spirits of his followers? No other but this; 'He is the anointed of the Lord.' That holy oil was the antidote for his blood. Saul did not lend David so unpierceable an armor, when he should encounter Goliath, as David now lent him in this plea of his unction. Which of all the discontented outlaws that lurked in that cave durst put forth his hand against Saul, when they once heard, 'He is the Lord's anointed?' Such an impression of awe hath the Divine Providence caused his image to make in the hearts of men, as that it makes traitors cowards; so as, instead of striking, they tremble. How much more lawless than the outlaws of Israel, are those professed

ringleaders of Christianity, which teach, and practise, and encourage, and reward, and canonize, the violation of majesty! It is not enough for those who are commanders of others, to refrain their own hands from doing evil, but they must carefully prevent the iniquity of their heels; else they shall be justly reputed to do that by others, which in their own persons they avoided. The laws both of God and man presuppose us in some sort answerable for our charge; as taking it for granted, that we should not undertake those reins which we cannot manage.

There was no reason David should lose the thanks of so noble a demonstration of his loyalty: whereto he trusts so much, that he dares call back the man by whom he was pursued; and make him judge, whether that fact had not deserved a life. As his act, so his word and gesture, imported nothing but humble obedience: neither was there more meekness than force in that seasonable persuasion; wherein he lets Saul see the error of his credulity, the unjust slanders of maliciousness, the opportunity of his revenge, the proof of his forbearance, the undeniable evidence of his innocence; and, after a lowly disparagement of himself, appeals to God for judgment, for protection.

So lively and feeling oratory did Saul find in the lap of his garment and the lips of David, that it is not in the power of his envy or ill-nature to hold out any longer: 'Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lift up his voice and wept, and said; Thou art more righteous than I.' He, whose harp was wont to quiet the frenzy of Saul, hath now by his words calmed his fury; so that now he sheds tears, instead of blood; and confesses his own wrong, and David's integrity; and, as if he were now again entered into the bounds of Naioth in Ramah, he prays, and prophesies good to him, whom he maliced for good; 'The Lord render thee good, for that thou hast done to me this day; for now behold, I know that thou shalt be king.'

There is no heart made of flesh, that some time or other relents not. Even flint and marble will, in some weather, stand on drops. I cannot think these tears and protestations feigned. Doubtless Saul meant as he said; and passed through sensible fits of good and evil. Let no man

think himself the better for good motions: the praise and benefit of those gusts is not in the receipt, but the retention.

Who, that had seen this meeting, could but have thought that all had been sure on David's side? What can secure us if not tears, and prayers, and oaths? Doubtless David's men, which knew themselves obnoxious to laws and creditors, began to think of some new refuge, as making account this new-pieced league would be everlasting. They looked when Saul would take David home to the court, and dissolve his army, and recompense that unjust persecution with just honor; when behold, in the loose, Saul goes home, but David and his men go up unto the hold. Wise David knows Saul not to be more kind than untrusty; and therefore would rather seek safety in his hold, than in the hold of a hollow and unsteady friendship. Here are good words, but no security; which therefore an experienced man gives the hearing, but stands the while on his own guard. No charity binds us to a trust of those, whom we have found faithless. Credulity on weak grounds, after palpable disappointments, is the daughter of folly. A man that is weather-wise, though he find an abatement of the storm, yet will not stir from under his shelter while he sees it thick in the wind. Distrust is the just gain of unfaithfulness.—1 Sam. xxiv.

NABAL AND ABIGAIL.

If innocency could have secured from Saul's malice, David had not been persecuted; and yet under that wicked king, aged Samuel dies in his bed. That there might be no place for envy, the good prophet had retired himself to the schools. Yet he, that hated David, for what he should be, did no less hate Samuel, for what he had been. Even in the midst of Saul's malignity, there remained in his heart impressions of awfulness unto Samuel: he feared, where he loved not. The restraint of God curbeth the rage of his most violent enemies, so as they cannot do their worst. As good husbands do not put all their corn to the oven, but save some for seed, so doth God ever in the worst of persecutions.

Samuel is dead; David banished; Saul tyrannizeth;

Israel hath good cause to mourn; it is no marvel if this lamentation be universal. There is no Israelite that feeleth not the loss of a Samuel. A good prophet is the common treasure, wherein every gracious soul hath a share. That man hath a dry heart, which can part with God's prophet without tears.

Nabal was, according to his name, foolish; yet rich and mighty. Earthly possessions are not always accompanied with wit and grace. Even the line of faithful Caleb will afford an ill-conditioned Nabal. Virtue is not like unto lands, inheritable. All that is traduced with the seed, is either evil, or not good. Let no man brag with the Jews, that he hath Abraham to his father: God hath raised up of this stone a son to Caleb.

Abigail (which signifieth her father's joy) had sorrow enough to be matched with so unworthy a husband. If her father had meant she should have had joy in herself, or in her life, he had not disposed her to a husband, though rich, yet fond and wicked. It is like he married her to the wealth, not to the man. Many a child is cast away on riches. Wealth in our matches should be as some grains or scruples in the balance, superadded to the gold of virtuous qualities, to weigh down the scales: when it is made the substance of the weight, and good qualities the appendance, there is but one earth poised with another; which, wheresoever it is done, it is a wonder, if either the children prove not the parents' sorrow, or the parents theirs.

Nabal's sheep-shearing was famous. Three thousand fleeces must needs require many hands: neither is any thing more plentiful commonly than a churl's feast. What a world was this, that the noble champion and rescuer of Israel, God's anointed, is driven to send to a base carle for victuals! It is no measuring of men, by the depth of the purse, by outward prosperity. Servants are oftentimes set on horseback, while princes go on foot. Our estimation must be led by their inward worth, which is not alterable by time, nor diminished with external conditions. One rag of a David is more worth, than the wardrobes of a thousand Nabals.

Even the best deservings may want. No man may be contemned for his necessity: perhaps he may be so much

richer in grace, as he is poorer in estate. Neither hath violence or casualty more impoverished a David, than his poverty hath enriched him. He, whose folly hath made himself miserable, is justly rewarded with neglect; but he that suffers for good, deserves so much more honor from others, as his distress is more. Our compassion or respect must be ruled, according to the cause of another's misery.

One good turn requires another. In some cases, not hurting is meritorious. He, that should examine the qualities of David's followers, must needs grant it worthy of a fee, that Nabal's flocks lay untouched in Carmel. But more, that David's soldiers were Nabal's shepherds, yea the keepers of his shepherds, gave them a just interest in that sheep-shearing feast; justly should they have been set at the upper end of the table. That Nabal's sheep were safe, he might thank his shepherds; that his shepherds were safe, he might thank David's soldiers. It is no small benefit that we receive in a safe protection. Well may we think our substance due, where we owe ourselves.

Yet this churlish Nabal doth not only give nothing to David's messengers, but, which is worse than nothing, ill words; 'Who is David, or who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now a-days, that break away from their masters.' David asked him bread; he giveth him stones. All Israel knew and honored their deliverer: yet this clown, to save his victuals, will needs make him a man, either of no merits or ill, either an obscure man or a fugitive.

Nothing is more cheap than good words. These Nabal might have given, and been never the poorer. If he had been resolved to shut his hands in a fear of Saul's revenge, he might have so tempered his denial, that the repulse might have been free from offence; but now his foul mouth doth not only deny, but revile. It should have been Nabal's glory, that his tribe yielded such a successor to the throne of Israel; now, in all likelihood, his envy stirs him up to disgrace that man, who surpassed him in honor and virtue, more than he was surpassed by him in wealth and ease.

Many a one speaks fair, that means ill; but when the mouth speaks foul, it argues a corrupt heart. If, with Saint James's verbal benefactors, we say only, 'Depart in peace, warm yourselves, fill your bellies,' we shall answer for hypocritical uncharitableness; but if we rate and curse those needy souls, whom we ought to relieve, we shall give a more fearful account of a savage cruelty, in trampling on those whom God hath humbled. If healing with good words be justly punishable, what torment is there for those that wound with evil?

David, which had all this while been in the school of patience, hath now his lesson to seek. He, who hath happily digested all the railings and persecutions of a wicked master, cannot put off this affront of a Nabal. Nothing can assuage his choler, but blood. How subject are the best of God's saints to weak passions! and, if we have the grace to ward an expected blow of temptation, how easily are we surprised with a sudden foil!

Wherefore serve these recorded weaknesses of holy men, but to strengthen us against the conscience of our infirmities? Not that we should take courage to imitate them in the evil, whereunto they have been miscarried; but we should take heart to ourselves, against the discouragement of our own evils.

The wisdom of God hath so contrived it, that, commonly, in societies, good is mixed with evil. Wicked Nabal hath in his house a wise and good servant, a prudent and worthy wife. That wise servant is careful to advertise his mistress of the danger; his prudent mistress is careful to prevent it.

The lives of all his family were now in hazard: she dares not commit this business to the fidelity of a messenger, but, forgetting her sex, puts herself into the errand. Her foot is not slow; her hand is not empty.

According to the offence, she frames her satisfaction. Her husband refused to give; she brings a bountiful gift: her husband gave ill words; she sweetens them with a meek and humble deprecation: her husband could say, 'Who is David?' she falls at his feet: her husband dismisses David's men empty; she brings her servants laden with provision; as if it had been only meant to ease the

repelled messengers of the carriage, not to scant them of the required benevolence. No wit, no art, could devise a more pithy and powerful oratory.

As all satisfaction, so hers, begins with a confession; wherein she deeply blameth the folly of her husband. She could not have been a good wife, if she had not honored her unworthy head. If a stranger should have termed him fool in her hearing, he could not have gone away in peace; now, to save his life, she is bold to acknowledge his folly: it is a good disparagement that preserveth. There is the same way to our peace in heaven: the only means to escape judgment, is to complain of our own vileness.

She pleadeth her ignorance of the fact, and therein her freedom from the offence: she humbly craveth acceptation of her present, with pardon of the fault: she professeth David's honorable acts and merits; she foretells his future success and glory: she lays before him the happy peace of his soul, in refraining from innocent blood. David's breast, which could not, through the seeds of grace, grow to a stubbornness in ill resolutions, cannot but relent with these powerful and seasonable persuasions; and now, instead of revenge, he blesseth God for sending Abigail to meet him; he blesseth Abigail for her counsel; he blesseth the counsel for so wholesome efficacy; and now rejoiceth more in being overcome with a wise and gracious advice, than he would have rejoiced in a revengeful victory.

A good heart is easily stayed from sinning, and is glad when it finds occasion to be crossed in ill purposes. Those secret checks, which are raised within itself, do readily conspire with all outward retentives. It never yielded to a wicked motion, without much reluctance, and when it is overcome, it is but with half a consent; whereas perverse and obdurate sinners, by reason they take full delight in evil, and have already in their conceit swallowed the pleasure of sin, abide not to be resisted, running on headily, in those wicked courses they have propounded in spite of opposition; and, if they be forcibly stopped in their way, they grow sullen and mutinous.

David had not only vowed, but deeply sworn, the

death of Nabal, and all his family, to the very dog that lay at his door; yet now he praiseth God, that hath given the occasion and grace to violate it. Wicked vows are ill made, but worse kept. Our tongue cannot tie us to commit sin. Good men think themselves happy, that since they had not the grace to deny sin, yet they had not the opportunity to accomplish it.

If Abigail had sat still at home, David had sinned, and she had died; now her discreet admonition hath preserved her from the sword, and diverted him from bloodshed. And now, what thanks, what benedictions, hath she for this seasonable counsel! How should it encourage us to admonish our brethren; to see, that if we prevail, we have blessings from them; if we prevail not, we have yet blessings from God, and thanks of our own hearts!

How near was Nabal to a mischief, and perceives it not! David was coming to the foot of the hill to cut his throat, while he was feasting in his house without fear. Little do sinners know, how near their jollity is to perdition. Many times judgment is at the threshold, while drunkenness and surfeit are at the board. Had he been any other than a Nabal, he had not sat down to feast till he had been sure of his peace with David: either not to expect danger, or not to clear it, was sottish. So foolish are carnal men, that give themselves over to their pleasures, while there are deadly quarrels depending against them in heaven.

There is nothing wherein wisdom is more seen, than in the temperate use of prosperity. A Nabal cannot abound, but he must be drunk and surfeit. Excess is a true argument of folly. We use to say, that when drink is in, wit is out; but if wit were not out, drink would not be in.

It was no time to advise Nabal, while his reason was drowned in a deluge of wine. A beast or a stone is as capable of good counsel as a drunkard. Oh that the noblest creature should so far abase himself, as for a little liquor to lose the use of those faculties, whereby he is a man! Those, that have to do with drink or frenzy, must be glad to watch times: so did Abigail, who, the next morning, presents to her husband the view of his faults, of his danger. He then sees, how near he was to

death, and felt it not. That worldly mind is so apprehensive of the death that should have been, as that he dies, to think that he had like to have died. Who would think a man could be so affected with a danger past, and yet so senseless of a future, yea imminent? He, that was yesternight as a beast, is now as a stone: he was then over-merry, now dead and lumpish. Carnal hearts are ever in extremities. If they be once down, their dejection is desperate, because they have no inward comfort to mitigate their sorrow. What difference there was betwixt the disposition of David and Nabal! How oft had David been in the valley of the shadow of death, and feared no evil! Nabal is but once put in mind of a death that might have been, and is stricken dead. It is just with God, that they who live without grace should die without comfort; neither can we expect better, while we go on in our sins.

The speech of Abigail smote Nabal into a qualm. That tongue had doubtless oft advised him well, and prevailed not; now, it occasions his death, whose reformation it could not effect. She meant nothing but his amendment; God meant to make that loving instrument the means of his revenge: she speaks, and God strikes; and within ten days, that swoon ends in death.

And now Nabal pays dear for his uncharitable reproach, for his riotous excess! That God, which would not suffer David to right himself by his own sword, takes the quarrel of his servant into his own hand. David hath now his ends without sin; rejoicing in the just executions of God, who would neither suffer him to sin in revenging, nor suffer his adversaries to sin unrevenged.

Our loving God is more angry with the wrongs done to his servants, than themselves can be; and knows how to punish that justly, which we could not undertake without wronging God, more than men have wronged us. He, that saith, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' repays oft-times when we have forgiven, when we have forgotten, and calls to reckoning after our discharges. It is dangerous offending any favorite of him, whose displeasure and revenge is everlasting.

How far God looks beyond our purposes! Abigail came

only to plead for an ill husband; and now God makes this journey a preparation for a better: so that in one act, she preserved an ill husband, and won a good one in the future. David well remembers her comely person, her wise speeches, her graceful carriage; and now, when modesty found it seasonable, he sends to sue her, which had been his suppliant. She entreated for her husband; David treats with her for his wife: her request was to escape his sword; he wisheth her to his bed. It was a fair suit to change a David for a Nabal; to become David's queen, instead of Nabal's drudge. She, that learned humility under so hard a tutor, abaseth herself no less when David offers to advance her; 'Let thine handmaid be a servant, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.' None are so fit to be great, as those that can stoop lowest. How could David be more happy in a wife? he finds at once piety, wisdom, humility, faithfulness, wealth, beauty. How could Abigail be more happy in a husband, than in the prophet, the champion, the anointed of God? Those marriages are well made, wherein virtues are matched, and happiness is mutual.—1 Sam. xxv.

DAVID AND ACHISH.

Good motions that fall into wicked hearts, are like some sparks that fall from the flint and steel into wet tinder; lightsome for the time, but soon out. After Saul's tears and protestations, yet he is now again in the wilderness with three thousand men, to hunt after innocent David.

How invincible is the charity and loyalty of an honest heart! The same hand, that spared Saul in the cave, spares him sleeping in the field: the same hand, that cut away the lap of his master's garment, carried away his spear; that spear, which might as well have carried away the life of the owner, is only borne away for a proof of the fidelity of the bearer.

Still Saul is strong, but David victorious, and triumphs over the malice of his persecutor; yet still the victor flieth from him, whom he hath overcome.

A man, that sees how far Saul was transported with his rancorous envy, cannot but say, that he was never more mad than when he was sober; for even after he had said,

'Blessed art thou, my son David, thou shalt do great things, and also prevail,' yet still he pursues him, whom he grants assured to prevail: what is this, but to resolve to lose his labor in sinning, and in spite of himself to offend? How shameful is our inequality of disposition to good! We know we cannot miss of the reward of well-doing, and yet do it not; while wicked men cast away their endeavors on those evil projects, whereof they are sure to fail. Sin blinds the eyes, and hardens the heart, and thrusts men into wilful mischiefs, however dangerous, however impossible; and never leaves them, till it have brought them to utter confusion.

The over-long continuance of a temptation, may easily weary the best patience; and may attain that by protraction, which it could never do by violence. David himself at last begins to bend under this trial; and resolves so to fly from Saul, as he runs from the church of God; and while he will avoid the malice of his master, joins himself with God's enemies.

The greatest saints on earth are not always on the same pitch of spiritual strength. He, that sometimes said, 'I will not be afraid of ten thousands,' now says, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' He had wont to consult with God; now he says thus in his own heart. How many evident experiments had David of God's deliverances; how certain and clear predictions of his future kingdom; how infallible an earnest was the holy oil, wherewith he was anointed, of the crown of Israel! And yet, 'David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.' The best faith is but like the twilight; mixed with some degrees of darkness and infidelity. We do utterly misreckon the greatest earthly holiness, if we exempt it from infirmities. It is not long, since David told Saul, that those wicked enemies of his, which cast him out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, did as good as bid him, Go serve other gods; yet now is he gone from the inheritance of God, into the land of the Philistines. That Saul might seek him no more, he hides himself out of the lists of the church, where a good man would not look for him.

Once before had David fled to this Achish; when he was

glad to scrabble on the doors, and let his spittle fall on his beard, in a semblance of madness, that he might escape; yet now, in a semblance of friendship, is he returned to save that life, which he was in danger to have lost in Israel. Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, whom David slew, was of Gath; yet David dwells with Achish, king of the Philistines, in Gath: even amongst them whose foreskins he had presented to Saul, by two hundreds at once, doth David choose to reside for safety. Howsoever it was a weakness in David, thus by his league of amity to strengthen the enemies of God, yet doth not God take advantage of it for his overthrow, but gives him protection, even where his presence offended; and gives him favor, where himself bore just hatred. Oh the infinite patience and mercy of our God, who doth good to us for our evil; and in the very act of our provocation upholdeth, yea, blesseth us with preservation!

Could Saul have rightly considered it, he had found it no small loss and impairing to his kingdom, that so valiant a captain, attended with six hundred able soldiers and their families, should forsake his land, and join with his enemies; yet he is not quiet, till he have abandoned his own strength. The world hath none so great enemy to a wicked man, as himself: his hands cannot be held from his own mischief: he will needs make his friends, enemies; his enemies, victors; himself, miserable.

David was too wise to cast himself into the hand of a Philistine king, without assurance. What assurance could he have, but promises? Those, David had from Saul abundantly, and trusted them not: he dares trust the fidelity of a pagan; he dares not trust the vows of a king of Israel. There may be fidelity without the church, and falsehood within. It need not be any news, to find some Turks true, and some Christians faithless.

Even unwise men are taught by experience; how much more they, who have wit to learn without it! David had well found, what it was to live in a court; he therefore, whom envy drove from the court of Israel, voluntarily declines the Philistine court, and sues for a country habitation. It had not been possible for so noted a stranger, after so much Philistine bloodshed, to live long

in such an eminency, amongst the press of those, whose sons, or brothers, or fathers, or allies, he had slaughtered, without some perilous machination of his ruin; therefore he makes suit for an early remove; 'For why should thy servant dwell in the chief city of the kingdom with thee?' Those, that would stand sure, must not affect too much height or conspicuity. The tall cedars are most subject to winds and lightnings, while the shrubs of the valleys stand unmoved. Much greatness doth but make a fairer mark for evil. There is true firmness and safety in mediocrity.

How rarely is it seen, that a man loseth by his modesty! The change fell out well to David, of Ziklag for Gath. Now he hath a city of his own. All Israel, where he was anointed, afforded him not so much possession. Now the city, which was anciently assigned to Judah, returns to the just owner; and is, by this means, entailed to the crown of David's successors. Besides that, now might David live out of the sight and hearing of the Philistine idolatries; and enjoy God, no less in the walls of a Philistine city, than in an Israelitish wilderness: withal, a happy opportunity was now opened to his friends of Israel, to resort unto his aid. The heads of the thousands that were of Manasseh, and many valiant captains of the other tribes, fell daily to him, and raised his six hundred followers to an army, like the host of God. The deserts of Israel could never have yielded David so great an advantage. That God, whose the earth is, makes room for his own every where; and ofttimes provideth them a foreign home, more kindly than the native. It is no matter for change of our soil, so we change not our God. If we can every where acknowledge him, he will no where be wanting to us.

It was not for God's champion to be idle. No sooner is he free from Saul's sword, than he begins an offensive war against the Amalekites, Gezrites, Geshurites. He knew these nations branded by God to destruction: neither could his increasing army be maintained with a little: by one act therefore, he both revenges for God, and provides for his host. Had it not been for that old quarrel, which God had with this people, David could not be

excused from a bloody cruelty, in killing whole countries, only for the benefit of the spoil; now, his soldiers were at once, God's executioners, and their own foragers. The intervention of a command from the Almighty alters the state of any act; and makes that worthy of praise, which else were no better than damnable. It is now justice, which were otherwise murder. The will of God is the rule of good. What need we inquire into other reasons of any act or determination, when we hear it comes from heaven?

How many hundred years had this brood of Canaanites lived securely in their country, since God commanded them to be rooted out, and now promised themselves the certainest peace! The Philistines were their friends, if not their lords. The Israelites had their hands full; neither did they know any grudge betwixt them and their neighbors; when suddenly, the sword of David cuts them off, and leaves none alive to tell the news. There is no safety in protraction. With men, delay causeth forgetfulness, or abates the force of anger; as all violent motions are weakest at the furthest: but with him, to whom all times are present, what can be gained by prorogation? Alas! what can it avail any of the cursed seed of Canaan, that they have made a truce with heaven and a league with hell? Their day is coming; and is not the further off, because they expect it not.

Miserable were the straits of David; while he was driven, not only to maintain his army by spoil, but to color his spoil by a sinful dissimulation. He tells Achish, that he had been roving against the south of Judah, and the south of the Jerahmeelites, and the south of the Kenites; either falsely or doubtfully, so as he meant to deceive him, under whom he lived, and by whom he was trusted. If Achish were a Philistine, yet he was David's friend, yea his patron; and if he had been neither, it had not become David to be false. The infirmities of God's children never appear, but in their extremities. It is hard for the best man, to say how far he will be tempted. If a man will put himself among Philistines, he cannot promise to come forth innocent.

How easily do we believe that which we wish! The more credit Achish gives unto David, the more sin it was

to deceive him; and now, the conceit of this engagement procures him a further service. The Philistines are assembled to fight with Israel. Achish dares trust David on his side; yea to keep his head for ever: neither can David do any less, than promise his aid against his own flesh.

Never was David, in all his life, driven to so hard an exigent; never was he so extremely perplexed. For what should he do now? To fight with Achish, he was tied by promise, by merit; not to fight against Israel, he was tied by his calling, by his unction: not to fight for Achish were to be unthankful; to fight against Israel, were to be unnatural. Oh what an inward battle must David needs have in his breast, when he thinks of this battle of Israel and the Philistines! How doth he wish now, that he had rather stood to the hazard of Saul's persecution, than to have put himself on the favor of Achish! He must fight on one side; and on whether side soever he should fight, he could not avoid to be treacherous; a condition worse than death to an honest heart. Which way he would have resolved, if it had come to the execution, who can know, since himself was doubtful? Either course had been no better than desperate. How could the Israelites ever have received him for their king, who in the open field had fought against them? And contrarily, if he would have fought against his friend for his enemy, against Achish for Saul, he was now environed with jealous Philistines; and might rather look for the punishment of his treason, than the glory of a victory.

His heart had led him into these straits; the Lord finds way to lead him out. The suggestions of his enemies do herein befriend him. The princes of the Philistines, whether of envy or suspicion, plead for David's dismission; 'Send this fellow back, that he may go again to his place, which thou hast appointed him; and let him not go down to the battle, lest he be an adversary to us.' No advocate could have said more; himself durst not have said so much. Oh the wisdom and goodness of our God, that can raise up an adversary, to deliver out of those evils which our friends cannot; that, by the sword of an enemy, can let that imposthume, which

no physician could tell how to cure! It would be wide with us sometimes, if it were not for others' malice.

There could not be a more just question, than this of the Philistine princes, 'What do these Hebrews here?' An Israelite is out of his element, when he is in an army of Philistines. The true servants of God are in their due places, when they are in opposition to his enemies. Profession of hostility becomes them better, than leagues of amity.

Yet Achish likes David's conversation and presence so well, that he professeth himself pleased with him, as with an angel of God. How strange is it to hear, that a Philistine should delight in that holy man, whom an Israelite abhors; and should be loath to be quit of David, whom Saul hath expelled! Terms of civility be equally open to all religions, to all professions. The common graces of God's children are able to attract love from the most obstinate enemies of goodness. If we affect them for by-respects of valor, wisdom, discourse, wit, it is their praise, not ours; but if for divine grace and religion, it is our praise with theirs.

Such now was David's condition, that he must plead for that he feared, and argue against that which he desired; 'What have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?' Never any news could be more cordial to him than this, of his dismission; yet must he seem to strive against it, with an importunate profession of his forwardness to that act which he most detested.

One degree of dissimulation draws on another. Those, which have once given way to a faulty course, cannot easily either stop or turn back; but are in a sort forced to second their ill beginnings, with worse proceedings. It is a dangerous and miserable thing, to cast ourselves into those actions, which draw with them a necessity, either of offending or miscarriage.—1 Sam. xxvii.

SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

Even the worst men may sometimes make head against some sins. Saul hath expelled the sorcerers out of the land

of Israel; and hath forbidden magic on pain of death. He, that had no care to expel Satan out of his own heart, yet will seem to drive him out of his kingdom. That we see wicked men oppose themselves to some sins, there is neither marvel nor comfort in it.

No doubt Satan made sport at this edict of Saul. What cares he to be banished in sorcery, while he is entertained in malice? He knew and found Saul his, while he resisted; and smiled to yield thus far unto his vassal. If we quit not all sins, he will be content we should either abandon or persecute some.

Where is no place for holy fear, there will be place for the servile. The graceless heart of Saul was astonished at the Philistines; yet was never moved at the frowns of that God whose anger sent them, nor of those sins of his which procured them. Those, that cannot fear for love, shall tremble for fear: and how much better is awe, than terror! prevention, than confusion! There is nothing more lamentable, than to see a man laugh when he should fear: God shall laugh, when such a one's fear cometh.

Extremity of distress will send even the profanest man to God. Like as the drowning man reacheth out his hand to that bough, which he contemned while he stood safe on the bank, Saul now asketh counsel of the Lord, whose prophet he hated, whose priests he slew, whose anointed he persecutes. Had Saul consulted with God when he should, this evil had not been; but now, if this evil had not been, he had not consulted with God. The thank of this act is due, not to him, but to his affliction.

A forced piety is thankless, unprofitable. God will not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Why should God answer that man by dreams, who had resisted him waking? Why should he answer him by Urim, that had slain his priests? Why should he answer him by prophets, who hated the father of the prophets, rebelled against the word of the prophets? It is an unreasonable inequality, to hope to find God at our command, when we would not be at his; to look that God should regard our voice in trouble, when we would not regard his in peace.

Unto what mad shifts are men driven by despair! If God will not answer, Satan shall; 'Saul said to his servants, Seek me a man that hath a familiar spirit.' If Saul had not known this course devilish, why did he decree to banish it, to mulct it with death? yet now, against the stream of his conscience, he will seek to those whom he had condemned.

There needs no other judge of Saul's act, than himself. Had he not before opposed this sin, he had not so heinously sinned in committing it. There cannot be a more fearful sign of a heart given up to a reprobate sense, than to cast itself wilfully into those sins, which it hath proclaimed to detest. The declinations to evil are many times insensible; but when it breaks forth into such apparent effects, even others' eyes may discern it.

What was Saul the better, to foreknow the issue of his approaching battle? If this consultation could have strengthened him against his enemies, or promoted his victory, there might have been some color for so foul an act; now, what could he gain, but the satisfying of his bootless curiosity, in foreseeing that, which he should not be able to avoid?

Foolish men give away their souls for nothing. The itch of impertinent and unprofitable knowledge, hath been the hereditary disease of the sons of Adam and Eve. How many have perished to know that, which hath procured their perishing! How ambitious should we be to know those things, the knowledge whereof is eternal life!

Many a lewd office are they put to, which serve wicked masters. One while, Saul's servants are sent to kill innocent David; another while, to shed the blood of God's priests; and now, they must go seek for a witch. It is no small happiness to attend them, from whom we may receive precepts and examples of virtue.

Had Saul been good, he had needed no disguise. Honest actions never shame the doers. Now, that he goeth about a sinful business, he changeth himself: he seeks the shelter of the night: he takes but two followers with him. It is true, that if Saul had come in the port of a king, the witch had as much dissembled her

condition, as now he dissembleth his; yet it was not only desire to speed, but guiltiness, that thus altered his habit. Such is the power of conscience, that even those who are most affected to evil, yet are ashamed to be thought such as they desire to be.

Saul needed another face to fit that tongue, which should say, 'Conjecture to me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up whom I shall name unto thee.' An obdurate heart can give way to any thing.

Notwithstanding the peremptory edict of Saul, there are still witches in Israel. Neither good laws, nor careful executions, can purge the church from malefactors. There will still be some, that will jeopard their heads on the grossest sins. No garden can be so curiously tended, that there should not be one weed left in it. Yet so far can good statutes, and due inflictions of punishments on offenders, prevail, that mischievous persons are glad to pull in their heads; and dare not do ill, but in disguise and darkness. It is no small advantage of justice, that it affrights sin, if it cannot be expelled; as contrarily, woful is the condition of that place, where is a public profession of wickedness.

The witch was no less crafty than wicked. She had before, as is like, bribed officers to escape indictment, to lurk in secresy; and now she will not work her feats without security. Her suspicion projects the worst; 'Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die?' O vain sorceress, that could be wary to avoid the punishment of Saul; careless to avoid the judgment of God!

Could we forethink what our sin would cost us, we durst not but be innocent. This is a good and seasonable answer for us to make unto Satan, when he solicits us to evil; 'Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die?' Nothing is more sure, than this intention in the tempter, than this event in the issue. Oh that we could but so much fear the eternal pains, as we do the temporary; and be but so careful, to save our souls from torment, as our bodies!

No sooner hath Saul sworn her safety, than she addresseth her to her sorcery. Hope of impunity draws on

sin with boldness. Were it not for the delusions of false promises, Satan should have no clients.

Could Saul be so ignorant, as to think that magic had power over God's deceased saints, to raise them up; yea, to call them down from their rest? Time was, when Saul was among the prophets; and yet now, that he is in the impure lodge of devils, how senseless he is, to say, 'Bring me up Samuel!' It is no rare thing, to lose even our wit and judgment together with graces. How justly are they given to sottishness, that have given themselves over to sin!

The sorceress, it seems, exercising her conjurations in a room apart, is informed by her familiar, who it was that set her on work. She can therefore find time, in the midst of her exorcisms, to bind the assurance of her own safety, by expostulation; 'She cried with a loud voice, Why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul?' The very name of Saul was an accusation; yet is he so far from striking his breast, that, doubting lest this fear of the witch should interrupt the desired work, he encourages her, whom he should have condemned; 'Be not afraid.' He, that had more cause to fear for his own sake in an expectation of just judgment, cheers up her, that feared nothing but himself. How ill doth it become us, to give that counsel to others, whereof we have more need and use in our own persons!

As one, that had more care to satisfy his own curiosity than her suspicion, he asks, 'What sawest thou?' Who would not have looked, that Saul's hair should have stared on his head, to hear of a spirit raised? His sin hath so hardened him, that he rather pleases himself in it, which hath nothing in it but horror.

So far is Satan content to descend to the service of his servants, that he will approve his feigned obedience to their very outward senses. What form is so glorious, that he either cannot or dare not undertake? Here, gods ascend out of the earth; elsewhere, Satan transforms him into an angel of light. What wonder is it, that his wicked instruments appear like saints, in their hypocritical dissimulation?

If we will be judging by the appearance, we shall be

sure to err. No eye could distinguish betwixt the true Samuel and a false spirit. Saul, who was well worthy to be deceived, seeing those grey hairs and that mantle, inclines himself to the ground, and bows himself. He, that would not worship God in Samuel alive, now worships Samuel in Satan: and no marvel; Satan was now become his refuge instead of God; his Urim was darkness, his prophet a ghost. Every one, that consults with Satan, worships him, though he bow not; neither doth that evil spirit desire any other reverence, than to be sought unto.

How cunningly doth Satan resemble, not only the habit and gesture, but the language of Samuel; 'Wherefore hast thou disquieted me? And wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee, and is thine enemy?' Nothing is more pleasing to that evil one, than to be solicited; yet, in the person of Samuel, he can say, 'Why hast thou disquieted me?' Had not the Lord been gone from Saul, he had never come to the devilish oracle of Endor; and yet the counterfeiting spirit can say, 'Why doest thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee?' Satan cares not how little he is known to be himself: he loves to pass under any form, rather than his own. The more holy the person is, the more carefully doth Satan act him; that by his stale, he may ensnare us.

In every motion, it is good to try the spirits, whether they be of God. Good words are no means to distinguish a prophet from a devil. Samuel himself, while he was alive, could not have spoken more gravely, more severely, more divinely, than this evil ghost; 'For the Lord will rent thy kingdom out of thy hand, and give it thy neighbor David: because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath on the Amalekites, therefore hath the Lord done this unto thee this day.' When the devil himself puts on gravity and religion, who can marvel at the hypocrisy of men? Well may lewd men be good preachers, when Satan himself can play the prophet. Where are those ignorants, that can think charitably of charms and spells, because they find nothing in them but good words? What prophet could

speak better words, than this devil in Samuel's mantle? Neither is there at any time so much danger of that evil spirit, as when he speaks best.

I could wonder to hear Satan preach thus prophetically, if I did not know, that, as he was once a good angel, so he can still act what he was.

While Saul was in consultation of sparing Agag, we shall never find that Satan would lay any block in his way: yea, then he was a prompt orator, to induce him into that sin; now that it is past and gone, he can load Saul with fearful denunciations of judgment. Till we have sinned, Satan is a parasite; when we have sinned, he is a tyrant. What cares he to flatter any more, when he hath what he would? Now, his only work is to terrify and confound, that he may enjoy what he hath won. How much better is it serving that Master, who, when we are most dejected with the conscience of evil, heartens us with inward comfort, and speaks peace to the soul in the midst of tumult!—1 Sam. xxviii.

ZIKLAG SPOILED AND REVENGED.

Had not the king of the Philistines sent David away early, his wives and his people and substance, which he left at Ziklag, had been utterly lost; now Achish did not more pleasure David in his entertainment, than in his dismission.

Saul was not David's enemy more, in the persecution of his person, than in the forbearance of God's enemies. Behold, thus late doth David feel the smart of Saul's sin, in sparing the Amalekites; who, if God's sentence had been duly executed, had not now survived, to annoy this parcel of Israel.

As, in spiritual respects, our sins are always hurtful to ourselves; so, in temporal, ofttimes prejudicial to posterity. A wicked man deserves ill of those, he never lived to see.

I cannot marvel at the Amalekites' assault made on the Israelites of Ziklag: I cannot but marvel at their clemency. How just was it, that, while David would give aid to the enemies of the church against Israel, the enemies of the church should rise against David in his peculiar

charge of Israel! But, while David, roving against the Amalekites, not many days before, left neither man nor woman alive, how strange is it, that the Amalekites, invading and suprising Ziklag, in revenge, kill neither man nor woman! Shall we say that mercy is fled from the breasts of Israelites, and rests in heathens? or shall we rather ascribe this to the gracious restraint of God, who, having designed Amalek to the slaughter of Israel, and not Israel to the slaughter of Amalek, moved the hands of Israel, and held the hands of Amalek? This was that alone, that made the heathens take up with an unbloody revenge; burning only the walls, and leading away the persons. Israel crossed the revealed will of God, in sparing Amalek; Amalek fulfils the secret will of God, in sparing Israel.

It was still the lot of Amalek, to take Israel at all advantages. On their first coming out of Egypt, when they were weary, weak, and unarmed, then did Amalek assault them; and now, when one part of Israel was in the field against the Philistines, another was gone with the Philistines against Israel, the Amalekites set on the coasts of both, and go away laden with the spoil: no other is to be expected of our spiritual adversaries, who are ever readiest to assail, when we are the unreadiest to defend.

It was a woful spectacle for David and his soldiers on their return, to find ruins and ashes, instead of houses; and instead of their families, solitude. Their city was vanished into smoke, their households into captivity; neither could they know whom to accuse, or where to inquire for redress. While they made account, that their home should recompense their tedious journey with comfort, the miserable desolation of their home doubles the discomfort of their journey. What remained there, but tears and lamentations? They lifted up their voices, and wept, till they could weep no more. Here was plenty of nothing but misery and sorrow.

The heart of every Israelite was brimful of grief. David's ran over; for, besides that his cross was the same with theirs, all theirs was his alone: each man looked on his fellow as a partner of affliction, but every one looked on David as the cause of all their affliction; and, as

common displeasure is never but fruitful of revenge, they all agree to stone him, as the author of their undoing, whom they followed all this while, as the hopeful means of their advancements.

Now David's loss is his least grief. Neither, as if every thing had conspired to torment him, can he look besides the aggravation of his sorrow and danger. Saul and his soldiers had hunted him out of Israel; the Philistine courtiers had hunted him from the favor of Achish; the Amalekites spoiled him in Ziklag; yet all these are easy adversaries, in comparison of his own: his own followers are so far from pitying his participation of the loss, that they are ready to kill him, because they are miserable with him. Oh the many and grievous perplexities of the man after God's own heart! If all his train had joined their best helps for the mitigation of his grief, their cordials had been too weak; but now, the vexation, that arises from their fury and malice, drowneth the sense of their loss, and were enough to distract the most resolute heart. Why should it be strange to us, that we meet with hard trials, when we see the dear anointed of God thus plunged in evils?

What should the distressed son of Jesse now do? whither should he think to turn him? To go back to Israel, he durst not; to go to Achish, he might not; to abide amongst those waste heaps, he could not; or, if there might have been harbor in those burnt walls, yet there could be no safety to remain with those mutinous spirits. 'But David comforted himself in the Lord his God.' O happy and sure refuge of a faithful soul! The earth yielded him nothing, but matter of disconsolation and heaviness: he lifts his eyes above the hills, whence cometh his salvation.

It is no marvel, that God remembereth David in all his troubles, since David in all his troubles did thus remember his God! He knew, that, though no mortal eye of reason or sense could discern any evasion from these intricate evils, yet that the eye of Divine Providence had descried it long before; and that though no human power could make way for his safety, yet that the overruling hand of his God could do it with ease. His experience

had assured him of the fidelity of his guardian in heaven, and therefore he comforted himself in the Lord his God.

In vain is comfort expected from God, if we consult not with him. Abiathar the priest is called for. David was not in the court of Achish, without the priest by his side; nor the priest without the ephod. Had these been left behind in Ziklag, they had been miscarried with the rest, and David had now been hopeless. How well it succeeds to the great, when they take God with them, in his ministers, in his ordinances! As contrarily, when these are laid by as superfluous, there can be nothing but uncertainty of success, or certainty of mischief. The presence of the priest and ephod would have little availed him without their use: by them he asks counsel of the Lord, in these straits.

The mouth and ears of God, which were shut unto Saul, are open unto David: no sooner can he ask, than he receives answer; and the answer that he receives is full of courage and comfort; 'Follow, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and recover all.' That God of truth never disappointed any man's trust. David now finds, that the eye which waited on God was not sent away weeping.

David therefore, and his men, are now on their march after the Amalekites. It is no lingering, when God bids us go. They, which had promised rest to their weary limbs, after their return from Achish, in their harbor of Ziklag, are glad to forget their hopes, and to put their stiff joints unto a new task of motion. It is no marvel, if two hundred of them were so over-tired with their former toil, that they were not able to pass over the river Besor.

David was a true type of Christ. We follow him in these holy wars, against the spiritual Amalekites. All of us are not of an equal strength: some are carried by the vigor of their faith, through all difficulties; others, after long pressure, are ready to languish in the way. Our leader is not more strong than pitiful; neither doth he scornfully cashier those, whose desires are hearty, while their abilities are unanswerable. How much more should our charity pardon the infirmities of our brethren; and

allow them to sit by the stuff, who cannot endure the march!

The same Providence, which appointed David to follow the Amalekites, had also ordered an Egyptian to be cast behind them. This cast servant, whom his cruel master had left to faintness and famine, shall be used as the means of the recovery of the Israelites' loss, and of the revenge of the Amalekites. Had not his master neglected him, all these rovers of Amalek had gone away with their life and booty. It is not safe, to despise the meanest vassal on earth. There is a mercy and care due to the most despicable piece of all humanity; wherein we cannot be wanting without the offence, without the punishment of God.

Charity distinguisheth an Israelite from an Amalekite. David's followers are strangers to this Egyptian. An Amalekite was his master. His master leaves him to die (in the field) of sickness and hunger; these strangers relieved him: and, ere they know whether they might by him receive any light in their pursuit, they refresh his dying spirits with bread and water, with figs and raisins; neither can the haste of their way be any hindrance to their compassion. He hath no Israelitish blood in him, that is utterly merciless.

Perhaps yet David's followers might also, in the hope of some intelligence, show kindness to this forlorn Egyptian. Worldly wisdom teacheth us, to sow small courtesies, where we may reap large harvests of recompense.

No sooner are his spirits recalled, than he requites his food with information. I cannot blame the Egyptian, that he was so easily induced, to descry these unkind Amalekites to merciful Israelites; those that gave him over unto death, to the restorers of his life: much less, that, ere he would descry them, he requires an oath of security from so bad a master. Well doth he match death with such a servitude.

Wonderful is the providence of God, even over those that are not, in the nearest bonds, his own. Three days and three nights, had this poor Egyptian slave lain sick and hunger-starved in the fields, and looks for nothing but death, when God sends him succor from the hands of those Israelites, whom he had helped to spoil: though

not so much for his sake, as for Israel's, is this heathenish straggler preserved.

It pleases God, to extend his common favors to all his creatures; but in miraculous preservations, he hath still wont to have respect to his own. By this means, therefore, are the Israelites brought to the sight of their late spoilers; whom they find scattered abroad, on all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing in triumph, for the great prey they had taken.

It was three days, at least, since this gainful foraging of Amalek; and now, seeing no fear of any pursuer, and promising themselves safety, in so great and untraced a distance, they make themselves merry with so rich and easy a victory; and now suddenly, when they began to think of enjoying the beauty and wealth they had gotten, the sword of David was on their throats. Destruction is never nearer, than when security hath chased away fear. With how sad faces and hearts had the wives of David, and the other captives of Israel, looked on the triumphal revels of Amalek; and what a change, do we think, appeared in them, when they saw their happy and valiant rescuers, flying in on their insolent victors, and making the death of the Amalekites the ransom of their captivity! They mourned even now at the dances of Amalek: now, in the shrieks and death of Amalek, they shout and rejoice. The mercy of our God forgets not to interchange our sorrows with joy, and the joy of the wicked with sorrow.

The Amalekites have paid a dear loan for the goods of Israel, which they now restore with their own lives. And now their spoil hath made David richer than he expected: that booty, which they had swept from all other parts, accrued to him.

Those Israelites, that could not go on to fight for their share, are come to meet their brethren with gratulation. How partial are we wont to be to our own causes! Even very Israelites will be ready to fall out for matter of profit. Where self-love hath bred a quarrel, every man is subject to flatter his own case. It seemed plausible and but just to the actors in this rescue, that those, which had taken no part in the pain and hazard of the journey,

should receive no part of the commodity. It was favor enough for them to recover their wives and children, though they shared not in the goods. Wise and holy David, whose praise was no less to overcome his own in time of peace than his enemies in war, calls his contending followers from law to equity; and so orders the matter, that, since the plaintiffs were detained not by will but by necessity, and since their forced stay was useful in guarding the stuff, they should partake equally of the prey with their fellows: a sentence well beseeming the justice of God's anointed. Those, that represent God on earth, should resemble him in their proceedings. It is the just mercy of our God, to measure us by our wills, not by our abilities; to recompense us graciously, according to the truth of our desires and endeavors; and to account that performed by us, which he only letteth us from performing. It were wide with us, if sometimes purpose did not supply actions. While our heart faulteth not, we, that through spiritual sickness are fain to abide by the stuff, shall share both in grace and glory with the victors.—1 Sam. xxx.

THE DEATH OF SAUL.

The Witch of Endor had half slain Saul before the battle: it is just, that they, who consult with devils, should go away with discomfort. He hath eaten his last bread at the hand of a sorceress: and now necessity draws him into that field, where he sees nothing but despair. Had not Saul believed the ill news of the counterfeit Samuel, he had not been struck down on the ground with words: now his belief made him desperate. Those actions, which are not sustained by hope, must needs languish; and are only promoted by outward compulsion. While the mind is uncertain of success, it relieves itself with the possibilities of good: in doubts, there is a comfortable mixture; but when it is assured of the worst event, it is utterly discouraged and dejected. It hath therefore pleased the wisdom of God, to hide from wicked men his determination of their final estate, that their remainders of hope may hearten them to good.

In all likelihood, one self-same day saw David a victor over the Amalekites, and Saul discomfited by the Philistines. How should it be otherwise? David consulted with God, and prevailed; Saul with the Witch of Endor, and perisheth. The end is commonly answerable to the way. It is an idle injustice, when we do ill, to look to speed well.

The slaughter of Saul and his sons was not in the first scene of this tragical field: that was rather reserved by God for the last act, that Saul's measure might be full. God is long, ere he strikes; but when he doth, it is to purpose.

First, Israel flees and falls down wounded in Mount Gilboa. They had their part in Saul's sin; they were actors in David's persecution: justly therefore do they suffer with him, whom they had seconded in offence. As it is hard to be good under an evil prince, so it is as rare not to be enwrapped in his judgments. It was no small addition to the anguish of Saul's death; to see his sons dead; to see his people fleeing, and slain before him. They had sinned in their king, and in them is their king punished.

The rest were not so worthy of pity; but whose heart would it not touch to see Jonathan, the good son of a wicked father, involved in the common destruction? Death is not partial. All dispositions, all merits, are alike to it; if valor, if holiness, if sincerity of heart, could have been any defence against mortality, Jonathan had survived: now by their wounds and death, no man can discern which is Jonathan. The soul only finds the difference, which the body admitteth not. Death is the common gate both to heaven and hell; we all pass that, ere our turning to either hand. The sword of the Philistines fetcheth Jonathan through it, with his fellows. No sooner is his foot over that threshold, than God conducteth him to glory. The best cannot be happy, but through their dissolution. Now therefore hath Jonathan no cause of complaint. He is, by the rude and cruel hand of a Philistine, but removed to a better kingdom, than he leaves to his brother; and, at once, is his death both a temporal

affliction to the son of Saul, and an entrance of glory to the friend of David.

The Philistine archers shot at random. God directs their arrows into the body of Saul. Lest the discomfiture of his people and the slaughter of his sons should not be grief enough to him, he feels himself wounded, and sees nothing before him but horror and death; and now, as a man forsaken of all hopes, he begs of his armor-bearer that death's-blow, which else he must, to the doubling of his indignation, receive from a Philistine. He begs this bloody favor of his servant, and is denied. Such an awfulness hath God placed in sovereignty, that no entreaty, no extremity, can move the hand against it. What metal are those men made of, that can suggest, or resolve, and attempt the violation of majesty?

Wicked men care more for the shame of the world, than the danger of their souls. Desperate Saul will now supply his armor-bearer; and as a man that bore arms against himself, he falls on his own sword. What if he had died by the weapon of a Philistine? so did his son Jonathan, and lost no glory. These conceits of disreputation prevail with carnal hearts, above all spiritual respects. There is no greater murderer, than vain-glory. Nothing more argues a heart void of grace, than to be transported by idle popularity into actions prejudicial to the soul.

Evil examples, especially of the great, never escaped imitation. The armor-bearer of Saul follows his master; and dares do that to himself, which to his king he durst not: as if their own swords had been more familiar executioners, they yielded unto them what they grudged to their pursuers.

From the beginning was Saul ever his own enemy; neither did any hands hurt him, but his own: and now his death is suitable to his life: his own hand pays him the reward of all his wickedness.

The end of hypocrites and envious men is commonly fearful. Now is the blood of God's priests which Saul shed, and of David which he would have shed, required and requited.

The evil spirit had said, the evening before, 'To-morrow thou shalt be with me;' and now Saul hasteth to make

the devil no liar. Rather than fail, he gives himself his own mittimus.

Oh the woful extremities of a despairing soul, plunging him ever into a greater mischief to avoid the less! He might have been a patient in another's violence, and faultless; now, while he will needs act the Philistines' part on himself, he lived and died a murderer. The case is deadly, when the prisoner breaks the jail, and will not stay for his delivery: and though we may not pass sentence on such a soul, yet on the fact we may: the soul may possibly repent in the parting; the act is heinous, and such as, without repentance, kills the soul.

It was the next day, ere the Philistines knew how much they were victors; then finding the dead corpse of Saul and his sons, they begin their triumphs. The head of king Saul is cut off in lieu of Goliath's; and now all their idol temples ring of their success. Foolish Philistines! if they had not been more beholden to Saul's sins than their gods, they had never carried away the honor of those trophies. Instead of magnifying the justice of the true God, who punished Saul with deserved death, they magnify the power of the false. Superstition is extremely injurious to God. It is no better than theft, to ascribe unto the second causes, that honor which is due unto the first; but to give God's glory to those things, which neither act nor are, it is the highest degree of spiritual robbery.

Saul was none of the best kings; yet, so impatient are his subjects of the indignity offered to his dead corpse, that they will rather leave their own bones amongst the Philistines, than the carcass of Saul. Such a close relation there is betwixt a prince and subject, that the dishonor of either is inseparable from both. How willing should we be to hazard our bodies or substance, for the vindication either of the person or name of a good king, while he lives to the benefit of our protection! It is an unjust ingratitude in those men, which can endure the disgrace of them, under whose shelter they live; but how unnatural is the villany of those miscreants, that can be content to be actors in the capital wrongs offered to sovereign authority!

It were a wonder, if, after the death of a prince, there

should want some pickthank, to insinuate himself into his successor. An Amalekite young man rides post to Ziklag, to find out David, whom even common rumor had notified for the anointed heir to the kingdom of Israel; to be the first messenger of that news, which he thought could be no other than acceptable, the death of Saul: and that the tidings might be so much more meritorious, he adds to the report, what he thinks might carry the greatest retribution. In hope of reward or honor, the man is content to belie himself to David. It was not the spear, but the sword of Saul, that was the instrument of his death; neither could this stranger find Saul but dying, since the armor-bearer of Saul saw him dead, ere he offered that violence to himself. The hand of this Amalekite therefore was not guilty; his tongue was.

Had not this messenger measured David's foot by his own last, he had forborne this piece of the news; and not hoped to advantage himself by this falsehood. Now he thinks; 'The tidings of a kingdom cannot but please. None but Saul and Jonathan stood in David's way; he cannot choose, but like to hear of their removal; especially, since Saul did so tyrannously persecute his innocence. If I shall only report the fact done by another, I shall go away but with the recompense of a lucky post; whereas, if I take on me the action, I am the man, to whom David is beholden for the kingdom: he cannot but honor and requite me, as the author of his deliverance and happiness.' Worldly minds think no man can be of any other than their own diet; and because they find the respects of self-love and private profit so strongly prevailing with themselves, they cannot conceive how these should be capable of a repulse from others.

How much was this Amalekite mocked of his hopes! While he imagined that David would now triumph and feast in the assured expectation of the kingdom, and possession of the crown of Israel, he finds him rending his clothes, and wringing his hands, and weeping, and mourning; as if all his comfort had been dead with Saul and Jonathan: and yet perhaps he thought, 'This sorrow of David is but fashionable; such as great heirs make show of in the fatal day they have longed for: these tears will

be soon dry; the sight of a crown will soon breed a succession of other passions:' but this error is soon corrected; for, when David had entertained this bearer with a sad fast all the day, he calls him forth in the evening to execution; 'How wast thou not afraid,' saith he, 'to put forth thine hand to destroy the anointed of the Lord?'

Doubtless, the Amalekite made many fair pleas for himself, out of the grounds of his own report: 'Alas, Saul was before fallen on his own spear. It was but mercy to kill him, that was half dead, that he might die the shorter. Besides, his entreaty and importunate prayers moved me, to hasten him through those painful gates of death. Had I stricken him as an enemy, I had deserved the blow I had given; now I lent him the hand of a friend. Why am I punished for obeying the voice of a king? and for perfecting what himself begun, and could not finish? And if neither his own wound nor mine had dispatched him, the Philistines were at his heels, ready to do this same act with insultation, which I did in favor; and if my hand had not prevented him, where had been the crown of Israel, which I now have here presented to thee? I could have delivered that to king Achish, and have been rewarded with honor. Let me not die, for an act well meant to thee, however construed by thee.'

But no pretence can make his own tale not deadly; 'Thy blood be upon thine own head; for thine own mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed.' It is a just supposition, that every man is so great a favorer of himself, that he will not mis-report his own actions, nor say the worst of himself. In matter of confession, men may without injury be taken at their words. If he did it, his fact was capital; if he did it not, his lie. It is pity any other recompense should befall those false flatterers, that can be content to father a sin to get thanks. Every drop of royal blood is sacred: for a man to say that he hath shed it, is mortal. Of how far different spirits from this of David's, are those men, which suborn the death of princes, and celebrate and canonize the murderers! 'Into their secret let not my soul come; my glory, be thou not joined to their assembly.'—1 Sam. xxxi. 1 Chron. x.

ABNER AND JOAB.

How merciful and seasonable are the provisions of God! Ziklag was now nothing but ruins and ashes. David might return to the soil where it stood; to the roofs and walls, he could not. No sooner is he disappointed of that harbor, than God provides him cities of Hebron. Saul shall die to give him elbow-room.

Now doth David find the comfort that his extremity sought, in the Lord his God. Now are his clouds for a time passed over, and the sun breaks gloriously forth. David shall reign after his sufferings. So shall we, if we endure to the end, find 'A crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give us at that day.'

But though David well knew that his head was long before anointed, and had heard Saul himself confidently avouching his succession; yet he will not stir from the heaps of Ziklag, till he have consulted with the Lord. It did not content him, that he had God's warrant for the kingdom; but he must have his instructions for the taking possession of it. How safe and happy is the man, that is resolved to do nothing without God! Neither will generalities of direction be sufficient: even particular circumstances must look for a word. Still is God a pillar of fire and cloud to the eye of every Israelite; neither may there be any motion or stay but from him. That action cannot but succeed, which proceeds on so sure a warrant.

God sends him to Hebron, a city of Judah. Neither will David go up thither alone; but he takes with him all his men, with their whole households: they shall take such part as himself: as they had shared with him in his misery, so they shall now in his prosperity. Neither doth he take advantage of their late mutiny, which was yet fresh and green, to cashier those unthankful and ungracious followers; but, pardoning their secret rebellions, he makes them partakers of his good success. Thus doth our heavenly Leader, whom David prefigured, take us to reign with him who have suffered with him: passing by our manifold infirmities, as if they had not been, he removeth us from the land of our banishment, and the ashes of our forlorn Ziklag, to the Hebron of our peace and glory. The expectation of this day must, as it did with David's soldiers, digest all our sorrows.

Never any calling of God was so conspicuous, as not to find some opposites. What Israelite did not know David appointed by God to the succession of the kingdom? Even the Amalekite could carry the crown to him, as the true owner; yet there wants not an Abner to resist him, and the title of an Ishbosheth to color his resistance.

If any of Saul's house could have made challenge to the crown, it should have been Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan; who, it seems, had too much of his father's blood, to be a competitor with David.

The question is not, who may claim the most right, but who may best serve the faction. Neither was Ishbosheth any other than Abner's stale. Saul could not have a fitter courtier: whether in the imitation of his master's envy, or the ambition of ruling under a borrowed name, he strongly opposed David. There are those, who strive against their own hearts, to make a side; with whom conscience is oppressed by affection. An ill quarrel, once undertaken, shall be maintained, although with blood. Now, not so much the blood of Saul, as the engagement of Abner, makes the war.

The sons of Zeruiah stand fast to David. It is much, how a man placeth his first interest. If Abner had been in Joab's room, when Saul's displeasure drove David from the court, or Joab in Abner's, these actions, these events, had been changed with the persons. It was the only happiness of Joab, that he fell on the better side.

Both the commanders under David and Ishbosheth were equally cruel: both are so inured to blood, that they make but a sport of killing. Custom makes sin so familiar, that the horror of it is to some turned into pleasure; 'Come, let the young men play before us.' Abner is the challenger, and speeds thereafter; for though in the matches of duel both sides miscarried, yet in the following conflict Abner and his men are beaten: by the success of those single combats, no man knows the better of the cause: both sides perish, to show how little God liked either the offer, or the acceptation of such a trial; but when both did their best, God punisheth the wrong part with discomfiture.

Oh the misery of civil dissension! Israel and Judah were brethren. One carried the name of the father, the

other of the son. Judah was but a branch of Israel; Israel was the root of Judah: yet Israel and Judah must fight, and kill each other; only on the quarrel of an ill leader's ambition.

The speed of Asahel was not greater than his courage. It was a mind fit for one of David's worthies, to strike at the head, to match himself with the best. He was both swift and strong; but 'The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.' If he had gone never so slowly, he might have overtaken death: now he runs to fetch it.

So little lust had Abner to shed the blood of a son of Zeruiah, that he twice advises him to retreat from pursuing his own peril. Asahel's cause was so much better as Abner's success. Many a one miscarries in the rash prosecution of a good quarrel, when the abettors of the worst part go away with victory. Heat of zeal, sometimes in the indiscreet pursuit of a just adversary, proves mortal to the agent, prejudicial to the service.

Abner, while he kills, yet he flies; and runs away from his own death, while he inflicts it on another.

David's followers had the better of the field and day. The sun, as unwilling to see any more Israelitish blood shed by brethren, hath withdrawn himself: and now, both parts having got the advantage of a hill under them, have safe convenience of parley. Abner begins; and persuades Joab to surcease the fight; 'Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not, that it will be bitterness in the end? How long shall it be, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?' It was his fault, that the sword devoured at all: and why was not the beginning of a civil war, bitterness? Why did he call forth the people to skirmish, and invite them to death?

Had Abner been on the winning hand, this motion had been thankworthy. It is a noble disposition in a victor, to call for a cessation of arms; whereas, necessity wrings this suit from the over-mastered. There cannot be a greater praise, to a valiant and wise commander, than a propension to all just terms of peace: for war, as it is sometimes necessary, so it is always evil; and if fighting have any other end proposed besides peace, it proves murder.

Abner shall find himself no less overcome by Joab,

in clemency, than power. He says not, 'I will not so easily leave the advantage of my victory: since the dice of war run on my side, I will follow the chance of my good success: thou shouldest have considered of this before thy provocation: it is now too late, to move unto forbearance:' but, as a man that meant to approve himself equally free, from cowardice in the beginning of the conflict, and from cruelty in the end, he professeth his forwardness to entertain any pretence of sheathing up the swords of Israel; and swears to Abner, that if it had not been for his proud irritation, the people had in the morning before ceased from that bloody pursuit of their brethren. As it becomes public persons to be lovers of peace, so they must show it on all good occasions; letting pass no opportunity of making spare of blood.

Ishbosheth was, it seems, a man of no great spirits; for, being no less than forty years old, when his father went into his last field against the Philistines, he was content to stay at home. Abner hath put ambition into him; and hath easily raised him to the head of a faction, against the anointed prince of God's people. If this usurped crown of Saul's son had any worth or glory in it, he cannot but acknowledge to owe it all unto Abner; yet how forward is unthankful Ishbosheth, to receive a false suggestion against his chief abettor: 'Wherefore hast thou gone into my father's concubine?' He, that made no conscience of an unjust claim to the crown and a maintenance of it with blood, yet seems scrupulous of a less sin, that carried in it the color of a disgrace. The touch of her, who had been honored by his father's bed, seemed an intolerable presumption, and such as could not be severed from his own dishonor. Self-love sometimes borrows the face of honest zeal. Those, who out of true grounds dislike sins, do hate them all indifferently, according to their heinousness: hypocrites are partial in their detestation; bewraying ever most bitterness against those offences, which may most prejudice their persons and reputations.

It is as dangerous as unjust, for princes to give both their ears and their heart to misgrounded rumors of their innocent followers. This wrong hath stripped Ishbosheth of the kingdom.

Abner, in the mean time, cannot be accused from a

treacherous inconstancy. If Saul's son had no true title to the crown, why did he maintain it? If he had, why did he forsake the cause and person? Had Abner, out of remorse for furthering a false claim, taken off his hand, I know not wherein he could be blamed, except for not doing it sooner; but now to withdraw his professed allegiance, on a private revenge, was to take a lewd leave of an ill action. If Ishbosheth were his lawful prince, no injury could warrant a revolt. Even betwixt private persons, a return of wrongs is both uncharitable and unjust; however this go current for the common justice of the world: how much more should we learn, from a supreme hand, to take hard measures with thanks! It had been Abner's duty, to have given his king a peaceable and humble satisfaction, and not to fly out in a snuff. 'If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences:' now his impatient falling, although to the right side, makes him no better than traitorously honest.

So soon as Abner had entertained a resolution of his rebellion, he persuades the elders of Israel to accompany him in the change: and whence doth he fetch his main motive, but from the oracle of God? 'The Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David, will I save my people Israel, out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.' Abner knew this full well before; yet then was well content, to smother a known truth for his own turn; and, now the publication of it may serve for his advantage, he wins the heart of Israel, by showing God's charter for him, whom he had so long opposed. Hypocrites make use of God for their own purposes; and care only, to make divine authority a color for their own designs. No man ever heard Abner godly till now; neither had he been so at this time, if he had not intended a revengeful departure from Ishbosheth. Nothing is more odious, than to make religion a stalking horse to policy.

Who can but glorify God in his justice, when he sees the bitter end of this treacherous dissimulation? David may, on considerations of state, entertain his new guest with a feast; and well might he seem to deserve a wel-

come, that undertakes to bring all Israel to the league and homage of David: but God never meant to use so unworthy means, for so good a work. Joab returns from pursuing a troop; and, finding Abner dismissed in peace and expectation of beneficial return, follows him; and, whether out of envy at a new rival of honor, or out of the revenge of Asahel, he repays him both dissimulation and death. God doth most justly by Joab, that which Joab did for himself most unjustly.

I know not, setting the quarrel aside, whether we can worthily blame Abner for the death of Asahel, who would needs, after fair warnings, run himself on Abner's spear; yet this fact shall procure his payment for the worse. Now is Ishbosheth's wrong revenged by an enemy. We may not always measure the justice of God's proceedings, by present occasions. He needs not make us acquainted, or ask us leave, when he will call for the arrearages of forgotten sins.—2 Sam. ii. iii.

BOOK XV.

UZZAH, AND THE ARK REMOVED.

The house of Saul is quiet; the Philistines beaten: victory cannot end better than in devotion; David is no sooner settled in his house at Jerusalem, than he fetcheth God to be his guest there. The thousands of Israel go now in a holy march, to bring up the ark of God to the place of his rest. The tumults of war afforded no opportunity of this service. Only peace is a friend to religion; neither is peace ever our friend, but when it is a servant of piety. The use of war is not more pernicious to the body, than the abuse of peace is to the soul. Alas! the riot bred of our long ease rather drives the ark of God from us; so, the still sedentary life is subject to diseases, and standing waters putrify. It may be just with God, to take away the blessing which we do so much abuse; and to scour off our rust with bloody war.

The ark of God had now many years rested in the obscure lodge of Abinadab, without the honor of a taber-

nacle. David will not endure himself glorious, and the ark of God contemptible. His first care is, to provide a fit room for God, in the head of the tribes, in his own city. The chief care of good princes must be the advancement of religion. What should the deputies of God rather do, than honor him whom they represent?

It was no good, that Israel could learn of Philistines. Those pagans had sent the ark back in a new cart; the Israelites saw God blessed that conduct, and now they practise it at home: but that, which God will take from Philistines, he will not brook from Israel. Aliens from God are no fit patterns for children. Divine institution had made this a carriage for the Levites, not for oxen: neither should those sons of Abinadab have driven the cart, but carried that sacred burden. God's businesses must be done after his own forms, which if we do with the best intentions alter, we presume.

It is long, since Israel saw so fair a day as this; wherein they went, in this holy triumph, to fetch the ark of God. Now their warlike trumpets are turned into harps and timbrels; and their hands, instead of wielding the sword and spear, strike on those musical strings, whereby they might express the joy of their hearts. Here was no noise but of mirth; no motion but pleasant. O happy Israel, that had a God to rejoice in, that had this occasion of rejoicing in their God, and a heart that embraced this occasion! There is nothing but this, wherein we may not joy immoderately, unseasonably: this spiritual joy can never be either out of time, or out of measure. 'Let him that rejoiceth, rejoice in the Lord.'

But now, when the Israelites were in the midst of this angel-like jollity, their hearts lifted up, their hands playing, their feet moving, their tongues singing and shouting, God sees good to strike them into a sudden dump, by the death of Uzzah. They are scarce set into the tune, when God mars their music, by a fearful judgment; and changes their mirth into astonishment and confusion. There could not be a more excellent work, than this they were about; there could not be more cheerful hearts in the performing of it; yet will the most holy God rather dash all this solemn service, than endure an act of presumption or infidelity.

Abinadab had been the faithful host of God's ark, for the space of twenty years: even in the midst of the terrors of Israel, who were justly affrighted with the vengeance inflicted on Bethshemesh, did he give harbor unto it; yet even the son of Abinadab is stricken dead, in the first departing of that blessed guest. The sanctity of the parent cannot bear out the sin of his son. The Holy One of Israel will be sanctified in all that come near him: he will be served like himself.

What then was the sin of Uzzah? What was the capital crime, for which he so fearfully perished? That the ark of God was committed to the cart, it was not his device only, but the common act of many; that it was not carried on the shoulders of Levites, was no less the fault of Ahio, and the rest of their brethren; only Uzzah is stricken. The rest sinned in negligence; he, in presumption. The ark of God shakes with the agitation of that carriage; he puts forth his hand to hold it steady. Human judgment would have found herein nothing heinous. God sees not with the eyes of men. None but the priests should have dared to touch the ark; it was enough for the Levites, to touch the bars that carried it. An unwarranted hand cannot so lightly touch the ark, but he strikes the God that dwells in it. No marvel if God strike that man with death, that strikes him with presumption. There was well-near the same quarrel against the thousands of Bethshemesh, and against Uzzah: they died for looking into the ark; he, for touching it. Lest Israel should grow into a contemptuous familiarity with this testimony of God's presence, he will hold them in awe with judgments.

The revenging hand of the Almighty, that, on the return of the ark stayed at the house of Abinadab, on the remove of the ark begins there again. Where are those, that think God will take up with a careless and slubbered service? He, whose infinite mercy uses to pass by our sins of infirmity, punisheth yet severely our bold faults. If we cannot do any thing in the degrees that he requireth, yet we must learn to do all things in the form that he requireth.

Doubtless Uzzah meant no otherwise than well, in putting forth his hand to stay the ark. He knew the sacred

utensils that were in it, the pot of manna, the tables of the law, the rod of Aaron, which might be wronged by that over-rough motion: to these he offers his aid, and is stricken dead. The best intention cannot excuse, much less warrant us, in unlawful actions. Where we do aught in faith, it pleaseth our good God to wink at and pity our weaknesses; but if we dare to present God with the well-meant services of our own making, we run into the indignation of God. There is nothing more dangerous, than to be our own carvers in matter of devotion.

I marvel not if the countenance of David were suddenly changed, to see the pale face of death in one of the chief actors in this holy procession. He, that had found God so favorable to him in actions of less worth, is troubled to see this success of a business so heartily directed unto his God; and now he begins to look through Uzzah at himself, and to say, 'How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?' Then only shall we make a right use of the judgments of God on others, when we shall fear them in ourselves; and, finding our sins at least equal, shall tremble at the expectation of the same deserved punishments. God intends, not only revenge in his execution, but reformation: as good princes regard, not so much the smart of the evil past, as the prevention of the future; which is never attained, but when we make applications of God's hand, and draw common causes out of God's particular proceedings.

I do not hear David say, 'Surely, this man is guilty of some secret sin, that the world knows not. God hath met with him. There is no danger to us. Why should I be discouraged to see God just? We may go on safely and prosper.' But here his foot stays, and his hand falls from his instrument, and his tongue is ready to tax his own unworthiness; 'How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?' That heart is carnal and proud, that thinks any man worse than himself.

David's fear stays his progress. Perhaps he might have proceeded with good success, but he dares not venture where he sees such a deadly check. It is better to be too fearful than too forward, in those affairs which do immediately concern God. As it is not good, to refrain

from holy businesses, so it is worse to do them ill. Awfulness is a safe interpreter of God's secret actions, and a wise guide of ours.

This event hath helped Obed-Edom to a guest he looked not for. God shall now sojourn in the house of him, in whose heart he dwelt before by a strong faith: else the man durst not have undertaken to receive that dreadful ark, which David himself feared to harbor. Oh the courage of an honest and faithful heart! Obed-Edom knew well enough what slaughter the ark had made amongst the Philistines, and after that amongst the Bethshemites, and now he saw Uzzah lie dead before him; yet doth he not make any scruple of entertaining it; neither doth he say, 'My neighbor Abinadab was a careful and religious host to the ark, and is now payed with the blood of his sons; how shall I hope to speed better?' But he opens his doors with a bold cheerfulness, and notwithstanding all those terrors, bids God welcome. Nothing can make God not amiable to his own. Even his very justice is lovely. Holy men know how to rejoice in the Lord with trembling; and can fear without discouragement.

The God of heaven will not receive any thing from men, on free cost. He will pay liberally for his lodging; a plentiful blessing on Obed-Edom and all his household. It was an honor to that zealous Gittite, that the ark should come under his roof; yet God rewards that honor with benediction: never man was loser by true godliness.

The house of Obed-Edom cannot this while want observation. The eyes of David and all Israel were never off from it, to see how it fared with this entertainment; and now, when they find nothing but a gracious acceptation and sensible blessing, the good king of Israel takes new heart, and hastens to fetch the ark into his royal city. The view of God's favors on the godly, is no small encouragement to confidence and obedience. Doubtless, Obed-Edom was not free from some weaknesses. If the Lord should have taken the advantage of judgment against him, what Israelites had not been disheartened from attending the ark? Now, David and Israel were not more affrighted with the vengeance on Uzzah, than encouraged

by the blessing of Obed-Edom. The wise God doth so order his just and merciful proceedings, that the awfulness of men may be tempered by love.

Now the sweet singer of Israel revives his holy music, and adds both more spirit and more pomp to so devout a business. I did not before hear of trumpets, nor dancing, nor shouting, nor sacrifice, nor the linen ephod. The sense of God's past displeasure doubles our care to please him, and our joy in his recovered approbation. We never make so much of our health, as after sickness; nor never are so officious to our friend, as after an unkindness.

In the first setting out of the ark, David's fear was at least an equal match to his joy; therefore, after the first six paces, he offered a sacrifice, both to pacify God and thank him: but now, when they saw no sign of dislike, they did more freely let themselves loose to a fearless joy; and the body strove to express the holy affection of the soul. There was no limb, no part, that did not profess their mirth by motion; no noise of voice or instrument wanted to assist their spiritual jollity. David led the way, dancing with all his might in his linen ephod. Uzzah was still in his eye: he durst not usurp on a garment of priests; but will borrow their color to grace the solemnity, though he dare not the fashion. White was ever the color of joy, and linen was light for use; therefore he covers his princely robes with white linen, and means to honor himself by his conformity to God's ministers.

Those, that think there is disgrace in the ephod, are far from the spirit of the man after God's own heart: neither can there be a greater argument of a foul soul, than a dislike of the glorious calling of God. Barren Michal hath too many sons, that scorn the holy habit and exercises: she looks through her window, and seeing the attire and gestures of her devout husband, despiseth him in her heart; neither can she conceal her contempt, but, like Saul's daughter, casts it proudly in his face; 'Oh, how glorious was the king of Israel this day; which was uncovered this day in the eyes of the maidens of his servants, as a fool uncovereth himself!' Worldly hearts can see nothing in actions of zeal, but folly and madness. Piety hath no relish to their palate, but distasteful.

David's heart did never swell so much at any reproach, as this of his wife: his love was for the time lost in his anger; and, as a man impatient of no affront so much as in the way of his devotion, he returns a bitter check to his Michal; 'It was before the Lord, which chose me rather than thy father, and all his house,' &c. Had not Michal twitted her husband with the shame of his zeal, she had not heard of the shameful rejection of her father; now, since she will be forgetting whose wife she was, she shall be put in mind whose daughter she was. Contumelies, that are cast on us in the causes of God, may safely be repaid. If we be meal-mouthed in the scorns of religion, we are not patient, but zealless: here, we may not forbear her, that lies in our bosom.

If David had not loved Michal dearly, he had never stood on those points with Abner. He knew, that if Abner came to him, the kingdom of Israel would accompany him; and yet he sends him the charge of not seeing his face, except he brought Michal, Saul's daughter, with him; as if he would not regard the crown of Israel, while he wanted that wife of his: yet here he takes her up roundly, as if she had been an enemy, not a partner of his bed. All relations are aloof off, in comparison of that betwixt God and the soul. 'He, that loves father, or mother, or wife, or child, better than me,' saith our Saviour, 'is not worthy of me.' Even the highest delights of our hearts must be trampled on, when they will stand out in rivality with God.

O happy resolution of the royal prophet, and prophetical king of Israel! 'I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be low in mine own sight.' He knew this very abasement heroical; and that the only way to true glory, is, not to be ashamed of our lowest humiliation unto God. Well might he promise himself honor from those, whose contempt she had threatened. The hearts of men are not their own: he that made them overrules them, and inclines them to an honorable conceit of those that honor their Maker; so as holy men have ofttimes inward reverence, even where they have outward indignities.

David came to bless his house; Michal brings a curse on herself. Her scorns shall make her childless to the day

of her death. Barrenness was held in those times none of the least judgments. God doth so revenge David's quarrel on Michal, that her sudden disgrace shall be recompensed with perpetual. She shall not be held worthy to bear a son, to him whom she unjustly contemned. How just is it with God, to provide whips for the backs of scorners! It is no marvel, if those that mock at goodness be plagued with continual fruitlessness.—2 Sam. vi. 1 Chron. xiii.

MEPHIBOSHETH AND ZIBA.

So soon as ever David can but breathe himself from the public cares, he casts back his thoughts to the dear remembrance of his Jonathan.

Saul's servant is likely to give him the best intelligence of Saul's sons. The question is therefore moved to Ziba; 'Remaineth there none of the house of Saul?' And, lest suspicion might conceal the remainders of an emulous line, in fear of revenge intended, he adds, 'On whom I may show the mercy of God for Jonathan's sake.' O friendship worthy of the monuments of eternity! Fit only to requite him, whose love was more than the love of women!

He doth not say, 'Is there any of the house of Jonathan?' but, 'of Saul?' that, for his friend's sake, he may show favor to the posterity of his persecutor. Jonathan's love could not be greater than Saul's malice, which also survived long in his issue; from whom David found a busy and stubborn rivalty for the crown of Israel: yet, as one that gladly buried all the hostility of Saul's house in Jonathan's grave, he asks, 'Is there any man left of Saul's house, that I may show him mercy for Jonathan's sake?' It is true love, that, overliving the person of a friend, will be inherited of his seed; but to love the posterity of an enemy in a friend, it is the miracle of friendship. The formal amity of the world is confined to a face; or to the possibility of recompense; languishing in the disability, and dying in the decease of the party affected. That love was ever false, that is not ever constant, and the most operative, when it cannot be either known or requited.

To cut off all unquiet competition for the kingdom of

Israel, the providence of God had so ordered, that there is none left of the house of Saul, besides the sons of his concubines, save only young and lame Mephibosheth: so young, that he was but five years of age, when David entered on the government of Israel; so lame, that, if his age had fitted, his impotence had made him unfit for the throne.

Mephibosheth was not born a cripple: it was a heedless nurse, that made him so: she, hearing of the death of Saul and Jonathan, made such haste to flee, that her young master was lamed with the fall. I wis, there needed no such speed to run away from David; whose love pursues the hidden son of his brother Jonathan. How often doth our ignorant mistaking cause us to run from our best friends; and to catch knocks and maims, of them that profess our protection!

Mephibosheth could not come otherwise than fearfully into the presence of David, whom he knew so long, so spitefully, opposed by the house of Saul. He could not be ignorant, that the fashion of the world is, to build their own security on the blood of the opposite faction; neither to think themselves safe, while any branch remains springing out of that root of their emulation: seasonably doth David therefore, first, expel all those unjust doubts, ere he administer his further cordials; 'Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness, for Jonathan thy father's sake; and will restore thee all the fields of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.'

David can see neither Saul's blood, nor lame legs, in Mephibosheth, while he sees in him the features of his friend Jonathan: how much less shall the God of mercies regard our infirmities, or the corrupt blood of our sinful progenitors, while he beholds us in the face of his Son, in whom he is well pleased!

Favors are wont so much more to affect us, as they are less expected by us. Mephibosheth, as overjoyed with so comfortable a word, and confounded in himself at the remembrance of the contrary deservings of his family, bows himself to the earth, and says, 'What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?'

I find no defect of wit, though of limbs, in Mephibo-

sheth: he knew himself the grand-child of the king of Israel, the son of Jonathan, the lawful heir of both; yet, in regard of his own impotency, and the trespass and rejection of his house, he thus abaseth himself unto David. Humiliation is a right use of God's affliction. What if he were born great? If the sin of his grandfather hath lost his estate, and the hand of his nurse hath deformed and disabled his person, he now forgets what he was, and calls himself worse than he is, 'A dog:' yet, 'A living dog is better than a dead lion;' there is dignity and comfort in life; Mephibosheth is therefore a 'dead dog' unto David. It is not for us to nourish the same spirits in our adverse estate, that we found in our highest prosperity. What use have we made of God's hand, if we be not the lower with our fall? God intends we should carry our cross, not make a fire of it to warm us. It is no bearing up our sails in a tempest.

Good David cannot disesteem Mephibosheth ever the more for disparaging himself: he loves and honors this humility in the son of Jonathan. There is no more certain way to glory and advancement, than a lowly dejection of ourselves. He, that made himself a dog, and therefore fit only to lie under the table, yea a dead dog, and therefore fit only for the ditch, is raised up to the table of a king; his seat shall be honorable, yea, royal; his fare delicious, his attendance noble. How much more will our gracious God lift up our heads, unto true honor before men and angels, if we can be sincerely humbled in his sight! If we miscall ourselves, in the meanness of our conceits, to him, he gives us a new name, and sets us at the table of his glory. It is contrary with God and men: if they reckon of us as we set ourselves, he values us according to our abasements.

Like a prince truly munificent and faithful, David promises and performs at once. Ziba, Saul's servant, hath the charge given him, of the execution of that royal word; 'He shall be the bailiff of this great husbandry of his master Mephibosheth.' The land of Saul, however forfeited, shall know no other master than Saul's grand-child.

As yet, Saul's servant had sped better than his son. I

read of twenty servants of Ziba, none of Mephibosheth. Earthly possessions do not always admit of equal divisions. The wheel is now turned up; Mephibosheth is a prince, Ziba is his officer.

I cannot but pity the condition of this good son of Jonathan. Into ill hands did honest Mephibosheth fall; first, of a careless nurse; then, of a treacherous servant: she maimed his body; he would have overthrown his estate. After some years of eye-service to Mephibosheth, wicked Ziba intends to give him a worse fall than his nurse. Never any court was free from detractors, from delators; who, if they see a man to be a cripple, that he cannot go to speak for himself, will be telling tales of him in the ears of the great: such an one was this perfidious Ziba; who, taking the opportunity of David's flight from his son Absalom, follows him with a fair present and a false tale, accusing his impotent master of a foul and traitorous ingratitude; laboring to tread on his lame lord, to raise himself to honor.

True-hearted Mephibosheth had as good a will as the best. If he could have commanded legs, he had not been left behind David; now, that he cannot go with him, he will not be well without him, and therefore puts himself to a wilful and sullen penance, for the absence and danger of his king: he will not so much as put on clean clothes for the time, as he that could not have any joy in himself, for the want of his lord David.

Unconscionable miscreants care not how they collogue, whom they slander, for a private advantage. Lewd Ziba comes with a gift in his hand, and a smooth tale in his mouth; 'O sir, you thought you had a Jonathan at home, but you will find a Saul. It were pity, but he should be set at your table, that would sit in your throne. You thought Saul's land would have contented Mephibosheth, but he would have all yours. Though he be lame, yet he would be climbing. Would you have thought that this cripple could be plotting for your kingdom, now that you are gone aside? Ishbosheth will never die, while Mephibosheth lives. How did he now forget his impotence, and raised up his spirits in a hope of day; and durst say, that now the time was come, wherein the crown

should revert to Saul's true heir.' O viper! if a serpent bite in secret when he is not charmed, no better is a slanderer. Honest Mephibosheth in good manners made a dead dog of himself, when David offered him the favor of his board; but Ziba would make him a very dog indeed, an ill-natured cur, that, when David did thus kindly feed him at his own table, would not only bite his fingers, but fly at his throat.

But what shall we say to this? Neither earthly sovereignty, nor holiness, can exempt men from human infirmity. Wise and good David hath now but one ear; and that misled with credulity. His charity in believing Ziba makes him uncharitable in distrusting, in censuring Mephibosheth. The detractor hath not only sudden credit given him, but Saul's land. Jonathan's son hath lost, unheard, that inheritance which was given him, unsought. Hearsay is no safe ground of any judgment. Ziba slanders; David believes; Mephibosheth suffers.

Lies shall not always prosper. God will not abide the truth to be ever oppressed. At last, Jonathan's lame son shall be found, as sound in heart as lame in his body. He, whose soul was like his father Jonathan's soul, whose body was like to his grandfather Saul's soul, meets David, as it is high time, on his return; bestirs his tongue to discharge himself of so foul a slander. The more horrible the crime had been, the more villanous was the unjust suggestion of it, and the more necessary was a just apology; sweetly therefore, and yet passionately, doth he labor to greaten David's favors to him; his own obligations and vileness; showing himself more affected with his wrong, than with his loss; welcoming David home with a thankful neglect of himself, as not caring that Ziba had his substance, now that he had his king. David is satisfied, Mephibosheth restored to favor and lands: here are two kind hearts well met. David is full of satisfaction from Mephibosheth; Mephibosheth runs over, with joy in David: David, like a gracious king, gives Mephibosheth, as before, Saul's lands to halves with Ziba; Mephibosheth, like a king, gives all to Ziba for joy that God had given him David.

All had been well, if Ziba had fared worse. Pardon

me, O holy and glorious soul of a prophet, of a king, after God's own heart; I must needs blame thee for mercy: a fault that the best and most generous natures are most subject to. It is pity that so good a thing should do hurt; yet we find that the best, misused, is most dangerous. Who should be the pattern of kings, but the king of God? Mercy is the goodliest flower in his crown, much more in theirs, but with a difference: God's mercy is infinite, theirs limited: he says, 'I will have mercy on whom I will;' they must say, 'I will have mercy on whom I should.' And yet he, for all his infinite mercy, hath vessels of wrath; so must they: of whom his justice hath said, 'Thine eye shall not spare them.' A good man is pitiful to his beast, shall he therefore make much of toads and snakes? Oh that Ziba should go away with any possession, save of shame and sorrow; that he should be coupled with a Mephibosheth in a partnership of estates! Oh that David had changed the word a little!

A division was due here, indeed; but of Ziba's ears from his head, or his head from his shoulders, for going about so maliciously to divide David from the son of Jonathan. 'An eye for an eye,' was God's rule. If that had been true, which Ziba suggested against Mephibosheth, he had been worthy to lose his head with his lands: being false, it had been but reason, Ziba should have changed heads with Mephibosheth. Had not holy David himself been so stung with the venomous tongues, that he cries out in the bitterness of his soul, 'What reward shall be given thee, O thou false tongue? Even sharp arrows, with hot burning coals?' He that was so sensible of himself in Doeg's wrong, doth he feel so little of Mephibosheth in Ziba's? Are these the arrows of David's quiver? Are these his hot burning coals, 'Thou and Ziba divide?' He that had said, 'Their tongue is a sharp sword,' now, that the sword of just revenge is in his hand, is this the blow he gives, 'Divide the possession?' I know not whether excess or want of mercy may prove most dangerous in the great; the one discourages good intentions with fear; the other may encourage wicked practices through presumption: those that are in eminent place must learn the mid-way betwixt both; so pardoning

faults, that they may not provoke them; so punishing them, that they may not dishearten virtuous and well-meant actions: they must learn to sing that absolute ditty, whereof David had here forgotten one part, of mercy and judgment.—2 Samuel ix.

HANUN, AND DAVID'S AMBASSADORS.

It is not the meaning of religion, to make men uncivil. If the king of Ammon were heathenish, yet his kindness may be acknowledged, may be returned, by the king of Israel. I say not, but that perhaps David might maintain too strait a league with that forbidden nation; a little friendship is enough to an idolater; but even the savage cannibals may receive an answer of outward courtesy. If a very dog fawn on us, we stroke him on the head, and clap him on the side; much less is the common band of humanity untied by grace. Disparity in spiritual professions is no warrant for ingratitude. He, therefore, whose good-nature proclaimed, to show mercy to any branch of Saul's house, for Jonathan's sake, will now also show kindness to Hanun, for the sake of Nahash his father.

It was the same Nahash, that offered the cruel condition to the men of Jabesh Gilead, of thrusting out their right eyes for the admission into his covenant. He, that was thus bloody in his design against Israel, yet was kind to David; perhaps for no cause so much as Saul's opposition: and yet even this favor is held worthy both of memory and retribution. Where we have the acts of courtesy, it is not necessary we should enter into a strict examination of the grounds of it: while the benefit is ours, let the intention be their own. Whatever the hearts of men are, we must look at their hands; and repay, not what they meant, but what they did.

Nahash is dead. David sends ambassadors to condole his loss, and to comfort his son Hanun. No Ammonite but is sadly affected with the death of a father, though it gain him a kingdom. Even Esau could say, 'The days of mourning for my father will come.' No earthly advantage can fill up the gap of nature. Those children are worse than Ammonites, that can think either gain, or liberty, worthy to countervail a parent's loss.

Carnal men are wont to measure another's foot by their own last: their own falsehood makes them unjustly suspicious of others. The princes of Ammon, because they are guilty to their own hollowness and doubleness of heart, are ready so to judge of David and his messengers; 'Thinkest thou, that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his own servants to thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, to overthrow it?' It is hard for a wicked heart to think well of any other; because it can think none better than itself, and knows itself evil. The freer a man is from vice himself, the more charitable he uses to be unto others.

Whatsoever David was particularly in his own person, it was ground enough of prejudice, that he was an Israelite. It was an hereditary and deep settled hatred, that the Ammonites had conceived against their brethren of Israel: neither can they forget that shameful and fearful foil, which they received from the rescuers of Jabesh Gilead; and now still do they stomach at the name of Israel. Malice, once conceived in worldly hearts, is not easily extinguished; but, on all occasions, is ready to break forth into a flame of revengeful actions.

Nothing can be more dangerous, than for young princes to meet with ill counsel in the entrance of their government; for both then are they most prone to take it, and most difficultly recovered from it. If we be set out of our way in the beginning of our journey, we wander all the day. How happy is that state, where, both the counsellors are faithful to give only good advice, and the king wise to discern good advice from evil.

The young king of Ammon is easily drawn, to believe his peers, and to mistrust the messengers; and, having now in his conceit turned them into spies, entertains them with a scornful disgrace: he shaves off one half of their beards, and cuts off one half of their garments; exposing them to the derision of all the beholders. The Israelites were forbidden either a shaven beard, or a short garment: in despite, perhaps, of their law, these ambassadors are sent away with both; certainly in a despite of their master, and a scorn of their persons.

King David is not a little sensible of the abuse of his messengers, and of himself in them; first, therefore, he desires to hide their shame; then, to revenge it.

Man hath but a double ornament of body, the one of nature, the other of art: the natural ornament is the hair, the artificial is apparel; David's messengers are deformed in both; the one is easily supplied by a new suit, the other can only be supplied out of the wardrobe of time, 'Tarry at Jericho, till your beards be grown.' How easily had this deformity been removed, if, as Hanun had shaven one side of their faces, so they had shaven the other. What had this been, but to resemble their younger age, or that other sex, in neither of which do we use to place any imagination of unbeseeming? Neither did there want some of their neighbor nations, whose faces age itself had not wont to cover with this shade of hair. But so respective is good David and his wise senators of their country-forms, that they shall by appointment rather tarry abroad, till time have wrought their conformity, than vary from the received fashions of their own people. Alas, into what a licentious variety of strange disguises are we fallen! The glory of attire is sought in novelty, in misshapenness, in monstrousness. There is much latitude, much liberty, in the use of these indifferent things; but because we are free, we may not run wild: and never think we have scope enough, unless we outrun modesty.

It is lawful for public persons, to feel their own indignities, and to endeavor their revenge. Now David sends all the host of the mighty men, to punish Ammon, for so foul an abuse. Those, that received the messengers of his love with scorn and insolency, shall now be severely saluted with the messengers of his wrath. It is just, both with God and men, that they, who know not how to take favors aright, should smart with judgments. Kindness repulsed breaks forth into indignation; how much more, when it is repaid with an injurious affront!

David cannot but feel his own cheeks shaven, and his own coat cut, in his ambassadors; they did but carry his person to Hanun; neither can he therefore but appropriate to himself, the kindness or injury offered unto them. He, that did so take to heart the cutting off but the lap of king

Saul's garment, when it was laid aside from him, how must he needs be affected with this disdainful halving of his hair and robes, in the person of his deputies!

The name of ambassadors hath been ever sacred; and by the universal law of nations, hath carried in it sufficient protection from all public wrongs; neither hath it been ever violated, without a revenge. O God, what shall we say to those notorious contempts, which are daily cast on thy spiritual messengers? Is it possible thou shouldest not feel them, thou shouldest not avenge them? 'We are made a gazing-stock to the world, to angels, and to men;' we are despised and trodden down in the dust; 'Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?'

How obstinate are wicked men, in their perverse resolutions! These foolish Ammonites would rather hire Syrians to maintain a war against Israel in so foul a quarrel, besides the hazard of their own lives, than confess the error of their jealous misconstruction.

It is one of the mad principles of wickedness, that it is a weakness to relent, and rather to die than yield: even ill causes, once undertaken, must be upheld although with blood; whereas the gracious heart, finding his own mistaking, doth not only remit of an ungrounded displeasure, but studies to be revenged of itself, and to give satisfaction to the offended.

The mercenary Syrians are drawn to venture their lives for a fee. Twenty thousand of them are hired into the field against Israel. Fond Pagans, that know not the value of a man! Their blood cost them nothing, and they care not to sell it good cheap. How can we think those men have souls, that esteem a little white earth above themselves; that never inquire into the justice of the quarrel, but the rate of the pay; that can rifle for drams of silver, in the bowels of their own flesh, and either kill or die for a day's wages?

Joab, the wise general of Israel, soon finds where the strength of the battle lay; and so marshals his troops, that the choice of his men should encounter the vanguard of the Syrians. His brother Abishai leads the rest against the children of Ammon; with this covenant of mutual

assistance, 'If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me; but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then will I come and help thee.' It is a happy thing, when the captains of God's people join together as brethren, and lend their hand to the aid of each other, against the common adversary. Concord in defence or assault is the way to victory; as, contrarily, the division of the leaders is the overthrow of the army.

Set aside some particular actions, Joab was a worthy captain, both for wisdom and valor. Who could either exhort or resolve better than he? 'Be of good courage, and let us play the men, for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.' It is not either private glory or profit that whets his fortitude, but the respect to the cause of God and his people. That soldier can never answer it to God, that strikes not more as a justicer, than as an enemy. Neither doth he content himself with his own courage, but he animates others. The tongue of a commander fights more than his hand. It is enough for private men, to exercise what life and limbs they have; a good leader must, out of his own abundance, put life and spirits into all others. If a lion lead sheep into the field, there is hope of victory. Lastly, when he hath done his best, he resolves to depend on God for the issue: not trusting to his sword, or his bow, but to the providence of the Almighty for success; as a man religiously awful, and awfully confident, while there should be no want in their own endeavors. He knew well, that the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; therefore he looks up above the hills, whence cometh his salvation. All valor is cowardice to that which is built on religion.

I marvel not to see Joab victorious, while he is thus godly. The Syrians flee before him, like flocks of sheep; the Ammonites follow them; the two sons of Zeruiah have nothing to do, but to pursue and execute. The throats of the Ammonites are cut, for cutting the beards and coats of the Israelitish messengers.

Neither doth this revenge end in the field; Rabba, the royal city of Ammon, is strongly beleaguered by Joab. The city of waters, after well near a year's siege, yieldeth: the rest can no longer hold.

Now Joab, as one that desireth more to approve himself a loyal and a careful subject than a happy general, sends to his master David, that he should come personally, and encamp against the city, and take it, 'Lest,' saith he, 'I take it, and it be called after my name.' O noble and imitable fidelity of a dutiful servant, that prefers his lord to himself, and is so far from stealing honor from his master's deserts, that he willingly remits of his own to add unto his. The war was not his; he was only employed by his sovereign. The same person, that was wronged in the ambassadors, revengeth by his soldiers. The praise of the act shall, like fountain-water, return to the sea, whence it originally came. To seek a man's own glory is not glory. Alas, how many are there, who, being sent to sue for God, woo for themselves! O God, it is a fearful thing to rob thee of that which is dearest to thee, glory; which, as thou wilt not give to any creature, so much less wilt thou endure that any creature should filch it from thee, and give it to himself. Have thou the honor of all our actions, who givest a being to our actions and us, and in both hast most justly regarded thine own praise.—2 Sam. x. 1 Chron. xix.

DAVID WITH BATHSHEBA AND URIAH.

With what unwillingness, with what fear, do I still look on the miscarriage of the man after God's own heart! O holy prophet, who can promise himself always to stand, when he sees thee fallen, and maimed with the fall? Who can assure himself of an immunity from the foulest sins, when he sees thee offending so heinously, so bloodily? Let profane eyes behold thee contentedly, as a pattern, as an excuse of sinning; I shall never look on thee but through tears, as a woful spectacle of human infirmity.

While Joab and all Israel were busy in the war against Ammon, in the siege of Rabbah, Satan finds time to lay siege to the secure heart of David.

Whoever found David thus tempted, thus foiled, in the days of his busy wars? Now only do I see the king of Israel, rising from his bed in the evening. The time was, when he rose up in the morning to his early devotion; when he brake his nightly rest, with public cares, with

the business of the state. All that while he was innocent, he was holy; but now that he wallows in the bed of idleness, he is fit to invite temptation. The industrious man hath no leisure to sin: the idle hath neither leisure nor power to avoid sin. Exercise is not more wholesome for the body, than for the soul; the remission whereof breeds matter of disease in both. The water, that hath been heated, soonest freezeth; the most active spirit soonest tireth with slacking. The earth stands still, and is all dregs; the heavens ever move, and are pure. We have no reason to complain of the assiduity of work; the toil of action is answered by the benefit; if we did less, we should suffer more. Satan, like an idle companion, if he find us busy, flies back, and sees it no time to entertain vain purposes with us. We cannot please him better, than by casting away our work, to hold chat with him. We cannot yield so far, and be guiltless.

Even David's eyes have no sooner the sleep rubbed out of them, than they rove to wanton prospects. He walks on his roof, and sees Bathsheba washing herself; inquires after her, sends for her, solicits her to uncleanness. The same spirit, that shut up his eyes in an unseasonable sleep, opens them on an enticing object: while sin hath such a solicitor, it cannot want either means or opportunity.

I cannot think Bathsheba could be so immodest, as to wash herself openly; especially from her natural uncleanness. Lust is quick-sighted: David hath espied her, where she could espy no beholder. His eyes recoil on his heart, and have smitten him with sinful desire.

There can be no safety to that soul, where the senses are let loose. He can never keep his covenant with God that makes not a covenant with his eyes. It is an idle presumption to think the outward man may be free, while the inward is safe. He is more than a man, whose heart is not led by his eyes; he is no regenerate man, whose eyes are not restrained by his heart.

O Bathsheba, how wert thou washed from thine uncleanness, when thou yieldedst to go into an adulterous bed! Never wert thou so foul, as now when thou wert new washed. The worst of nature is cleanliness to the best of sin: thou hadst been clean, if thou hadst not

washed; yet for thee, I know how to plead infirmity of sex, and the importunity of a king: but what shall I say for thee, O thou royal prophet, and prophetical king of Israel? Where shall I find aught to extenuate that crime, for which God himself hath noted thee? Did not thy holy profession teach thee, to abhor such a sin more than death? Was not thy justice wont to punish this sin, with no less than death? Did not thy very calling call thee to a protection and preservation of justice, of chastity, in thy subjects? Didst thou want store of wives of thine own? Wert thou restrained from taking more? Was there no beauty in Israel, but in a subject's marriage-bed? Wert thou overcome by the vehement solicitations of an adultress? Wert thou not the tempter, the prosecutor, of this uncleanness? I should accuse thee deeply, if thou hadst not accused thyself. Nothing wanted to greaten thy sin, or our wonder and fear. O God, whither do we go, if thou stay us not? Whoever, amongst the millions of thy servants, could find himself furnished with stronger preservatives against sin? Against whom could such a sin find less pretence of prevailing? Oh keep thou us, that presumptuous sins prevail not over us; so only shall we be free from great offences.

The suits of kings are imperative. Ambition did now prove a bawd to lust. Bathsheba yieldeth to offend God, to dishonor her husband, to clog and wound her own soul to abuse her body. Dishonesty grows bold, when it is countenanced with greatness. Eminent persons had need be careful of their demands: they sin by authority, that are solicited by the mighty.

Had Bathsheba been mindful of her matrimonial fidelity, perhaps David had been soon checked in his inordinate desire: her facility furthers the sin. The first motioner of evil is most faulty; but, as in quarrels, so in offences, the second blow (which is the consent) makes the fray. Good Joseph was moved to folly by his great and beautiful mistress: this fire fell on wet tinder, and therefore soon went out.

Sin is not acted alone; if but one party be wise, both escape. It is no excuse, to say, 'I was tempted,' though by the great, though by the holy and learned. Almost

all sinners are misled, by that transformed angel of light. The action is that we must regard, not the person. Let the mover be never so glorious, if he stir us to evil, he must be entertained with defiance.

The God, that knows how to raise good out of evil, blesses an adulterous copulation with that increase, which he denies to the chaste embracements of honest wedlock. Bathsheba hath conceived by David; and now at once conceives a sorrow and care, how to smother the shame of her conception: he that did the fact must hide it.

O David, where is thy repentance? Where is thy tenderness and compunction of heart? Where are those holy meditations, which had wont to take up thy soul? Alas! instead of clearing thy sin, thou laborest to cloke it; and spendest those thoughts in the concealing of thy wickedness, which thou shouldest rather have bestowed in preventing it. The best of God's children may not only be drenched in the waves of sin, but lie in them for the time, and perhaps sink twice to the bottom. What hypocrite could have done worse, than study how to cover the face of his sin from the eyes of men, while he regarded not the sting of sin in his soul?

As there are some acts, wherein the hypocrite is a saint, so there are some, wherein the greatest saint on earth may be a hypocrite. Saul did thus go about to color his sin, and is cursed. The vessels of mercy and wrath are not ever distinguishable by their actions. He makes the difference, that 'will have mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.'

It is rare and hard to commit a single sin. David hath abused the wife of Uriah; now he would abuse his person, in causing him to father a false seed. That worthy Hittite is sent for from the wars; and now, after some cunning and far-fetched questions, is dismissed to his house, not without a present of favor. David could not but imagine, that the beauty of his Bathsheba must needs be attractive enough to a husband, whom long absence in wars had withheld all that while from so pleasing a bed; neither could he think, that, since that face and those breasts had power to allure himself to an unlawful

lust, it could be possible, that Uriah should not be invited by them, to an allowed and warrantable fruition.

That David's heart might now the rather strike him, in comparing the chaste resolutions of his servant with his own light incontinence, good Uriah sleeps at the door of the king's palace; making choice of a stony pillow, under the canopy of heaven, rather than the delicate bed of her, whom he thought as honest as he knew fair. 'The ark,' saith he, 'and Israel, and Judah, dwell in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, abide in the open fields; shall I then go into my house to eat, and drink, and lie with my wife? By thy life, and by the life of thy soul, I will not do this thing.'

Who can but be astonished at this change; to see a soldier austere, and a prophet wanton! And how doth that soldier's austerity shame the prophet's wantonness! O zealous and mortified soul, worthy of a more faithful wife, of a more just master, how didst thou overlook all base sensuality, and hatedst to be happy alone! War and lust had wont to be reputed friends. Thy breast is not more full of courage than chastity; and is so far from wandering after forbidden pleasures, that it refuseth lawful.

'There is a time to laugh, and a time to mourn; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embracing.' Even the best actions are not always seasonable, much less the indifferent. He, that ever takes liberty to do what he may, shall offend no less, than he that sometimes takes liberty to do what he may not.

If any thing, the ark of God is fittest to lead our tunes. Accordingly as that is either distressed or prospereth, should we frame our mirth or mourning. To dwell in ceiled houses, while the temple lies waste, is the ground of God's just quarrel. 'How shall we sing a song of the Lord in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joy.'

As every man is a limb of the community, so must he be affected with the estate of the universal body, whether

healthful or languishing. It did not more aggravate David's sin, that, while the ark and Israel was in hazard and distress, he could find time to loose the reins to wanton desires and actions, than it magnifies the religious zeal of Uriah, that he abandons comfort, till he see the ark and Israel victorious. Common dangers or calamities must, like the rapt motion, carry our hearts contrary to the ways of our private occasions.

He, that cannot be moved with words, shall be tried with wine. Uriah had equally protested, against feasting at home, and society with his wife; to the one, the authority of a king forceth him abroad, in hope that the excess thereof shall force him to the other. It is like, that holy captain intended only to yield so much obedience, as might consist with his course of austerity. But 'Wine is a mocker.' When it goes plausibly in, no man can imagine how it will rage and tyrannise. He, that receives that traitor within his gates, shall too late complain of surprisal. Like unto that ill spirit, it insinuates sweetly, but in the end 'it bites like a serpent, and hurts like a cockatrice.' Even good Uriah is made drunk. The holiest soul may be overtaken. It is hard gainsaying, where a king begins a health to a subject.

Where, oh where, will this wickedness end? David will now procure the sin of another, to hide his own. Uriah's drunkenness is more David's offence, than his. It is weakly yielded to of the one, which was wilfully intended of the other. The one was as the sinner, the other as the tempter.

Had not David known that wine was an inducement to lust, he had spared those superfluous cups. Experience had taught him, that the eye debauched with wine will look on strange women. The drunkard may be any thing, save good. Yet in this the aim failed. Grace is stronger than wine: while that withholds, in vain shall the fury of the grape attempt to carry Uriah to his own bed. Sober David is now worse than drunken Uriah. Had not the king of Israel been more intoxicate with sin, than Uriah with drink, he had not in a sober intemperance climbed up into that bed, which the drunken temperance of Uriah refused.

If David had been but himself, how had he loved, how had he honored, this honest and religious zeal, in his so faithful servant; whom now he cruelly seeks to reward with death! That fact which wine cannot hide, the sword shall. Uriah shall bear his own mittimus unto Joab; 'Put ye Uriah in the fore-front of the strength of the battle, and recoil back from him, that he may be smitten and die.' What is become of thee, O thou good spirit, that hadst wont to guide thy chosen servant in his former ways? Is not this the man, whom we lately saw so heart-smitten, for but cutting off the lap of the garment of a wicked master, that is now thus lavish of the blood of a gracious and well-deserving servant? Could it be likely, that so worthy a captain could fall alone? Could David have expiated this sin with his own blood, it had been but well spent; but to cover his sin with the innocent blood of others, was a crime above astonishment.

Oh the deep deceitfulness of sin! If the devil should have come to David in the most lovely form of Bathsheba herself, and at the first should have directly and in plain terms solicited him to murder his best servant, I doubt not but he would have spit scorn in that face, on which he should otherwise have doted; now, by many cunning windings, Satan rises up to that temptation, and prevails: that shall be done for a color of guiltiness, whereof the soul would have hated to be immediately guilty. Even those, that find a just horror, in leaping down from some high tower, yet may be persuaded to descend by stairs to the bottom. He knows not where he shall stay, that hath willingly slipped into a known wickedness.

How many doth an eminent offender draw with him into evil! It could not be, but that divers of the attendants, both of David and Bathsheba, must be conscious to that adultery. Great men's sins are seldom secret. And now Joab must be fetched in, as accessory to the murder. How must this example needs harden Joab, against the conscience of Abner's blood; while he cannot but think, David cannot avenge that in me, which he acteth himself!

Honor is pretended to poor Uriah; death is meant. This man was one of the worthies of David. Their cou-

rage sought glory, in the difficultest exploits. That reputation had never been purchased, without attempts of equal danger.

Had not the leader and followers of Uriah been more treacherous, than his enemies were strong, he had come off with victory; now, he was not the first or last that perished by his friends. David hath forgotten, that himself was in like sort betrayed in his master's intention, on the dowry of the Philistines' foreskins.

I fear to ask, Who ever noted so foul a plot in David's rejected predecessor? Uriah must be the messenger of his own death; Joab must be a traitor to his friend; the host of God must shamefully turn their backs on the Ammonites; all that Israelitish blood must be shed; that murder must be seconded with dissimulation; and all this to hide one adultery! O God, thou hadst never suffered so dear a favorite of thine to fall so fearfully, if thou hadst not meant to make him a universal example to mankind, of not presuming, of not despairing. How can we presume of not sinning, or despair for sinning, when we find so great a saint thus fallen, thus risen!—2 Sam. xi.

NATHAN AND DAVID.

Yet Bathsheba mourned for the death of that husband, whom she had been drawn to dishonor. How could she bestow tears enough on that funeral, whereof her sin was the cause! If she had but a suspicion of the plot of his death, the fountains of her eyes could not yield water enough to wash off her husband's blood. Her sin was more worthy of sorrow, than her loss. If this grief had been right placed, the hope of hiding her shame and the ambition to be a queen had not so soon mitigated it; neither had she, on any terms, been drawn into the bed of her husband's murderer. Every gleam of earthly comfort can dry up the tears of worldly sorrow. Bathsheba hath soon lost her grief at the court. The remembrance of a husband is buried in the jollity and state of a princess.

David securely enjoys his ill-purchased love; and is content to exchange the conscience of his sin, for the

sense of his pleasure. But the just and holy God will not put it up so. He, that hates sin so much the more as the offender is more dear to him, will let David feel the bruise of his fall. If God's best children have been sometimes suffered to sleep in a sin, at last he hath awakened them in a fright.

David was a prophet of God; and yet he hath not only stepped into those foul sins, but sojourns with them. If any profession or state of life could have privileged from sin, the angels had not sinned in heaven, nor man in paradise.

Nathan the prophet is sent to the prophet David, for reproof, for conviction. Had it been any other man's case, none could have been more quick-sighted than the princely prophet; in his own, he is so blind, that God is fain to lend him others' eyes. Even the physician himself, when he is sick, sends for the counsel of those, whom his health did mutually aid with advice. Let no man think himself too good to learn. Teachers themselves may be taught that, in their own particular, which, in a generality, they have often taught others. It is not only ignorance that is to be removed, but misaffection.

Who can prescribe a just period to the best man's repentance? About ten months are passed, since David's sin; in all which time, I find no news of any serious compunction. It could not be, but some glances of remorse must needs have passed through his soul, long ere this; but a due and solemn contrition was not heard of, till Nathan's message; and perhaps had been further adjourned, if that monitor had been longer deferred. Alas! what long and dead sleeps may the holiest soul take in fearful sins! Were it not for thy mercy, O God, the best of us should end our spiritual lethargy in sleep of death.

It might have pleased God as easily to have sent Nathan to check David in his first purpose of sinning; so had his eyes been restrained, Bathsheba honest, Uriah alive with honor: now, the wisdom of the Almighty knew how to win more glory, by the permission of so foul an evil, than by the prevention; yea, he knew how, by

the permission of one sin, to prevent millions. How many thousands had sinned, in a vain presumption on their own strength, if David had not thus offended! How many thousands had despaired, in the conscience of their own weaknesses, if these horrible sins had not received forgiveness! It is happy for all times, that we have so holy a sinner, so sinful a penitent.

It matters not how bitter the pill is, but how well wrapped. So cunningly hath Nathan conveyed this dose, that it begins to work ere it be tasted. There is no one thing, wherein is more use of wisdom, than the due contriving of reprehension; which, in a discreet delivery helps the disease, in an unwise destroys nature.

Had not Nathan been used to the possession of David's ear, this complaint had been suspected. It well beseems a king, to take information by a prophet.

While wise Nathan was querulously discoursing of the cruel rich man, that had forcibly taken away the only lamb of his poor neighbor, how willingly doth David listen to the story; and how sharply, even above law, doth he censure the fact; 'As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die!' Full little did he think, that he had pronounced sentence against himself. It had not been so heavy, if he had known on whom it should have lit. We have open ears and quick tongues to the vices of others. How severe justicers we can be, to our very own crimes in others' persons! How flattering parasites, to another's crime in ourselves!

The life of doctrine is in application. Nathan might have been long enough in his narration, in his invective, ere David would have been touched with his own guiltiness; but now that the prophet brings the word home to his bosom, he cannot but be affected. We may take pleasure, to hear men speak in the clouds; we never take profit, till we find a propriety in the exhortation or reproof.

There was not more cunning in the parable, than courage in the application, 'Thou art the man.' If David be a king, he may not look, not to hear of his faults. God's messages may be no other than impartial. It is a treacherous flattery, in divine errands to regard greatness.

If prophets must be mannerly in the form, yet in the matter of reproof resolute. The words are not their own: they are but the heralds of the King of Heaven; 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.'

How thunder-stricken do we think David did now stand! How did the change of his color bewray the confusion in his soul; while his conscience said the same within, which the prophet sounded in his ear! And now, lest aught should be wanting to his humiliation, all God's former favors shall be laid before his eyes, by way of exprobration. He is worthy to be upbraided with mercies, that hath abused mercies unto wantonness. While we do well, God gives, and says nothing; when we do ill, he lays his benefits in our dish, and casts them in our teeth, that our shame may be so much the more, by how much our obligations have been greater. The blessings of God, in our unworthy carriage, prove but the aggravations of sin, and additions to judgment.

I see all God's children falling into sin; some of them lying in sin; none of them maintaining their sin. David cannot have the heart or the face, to stand out against the message of God; but now, as a man confounded, and condemned in himself, he cries out, in the bitterness of a wounded soul, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

It was a short word, but passionate; and such as came from the bottom of a contrite heart. The greatest griefs are not most verbal. Saul confessed his sin more largely, less effectually. God cares not for phrases, but for affections.

The first piece of our amends to God for sinning, is the acknowledgment of sin. He can do little, that in a just offence cannot accuse himself. If we cannot be so good as we would, it is reason we should do God so much right, as to say, how evil we are. And why was not this done sooner? It is strange to see how easily sin gets into the heart; how hardly it gets out of the mouth. Is it because sin, like unto Satan, where it hath got possession is desirous to hold it; and knows that it is fully ejected by a free confession? or, because in a guiltiness of deformity, it hides itself in the breast where it is once entertained, and hates the light? or, because

the tongue is so fed with self-love, that it is loath to be drawn unto any verdict against the heart or hands? or, is it out of an idle misprision of shame, which, while it should be placed in offending, is misplaced in disclosing of our offence? However, sure I am, that God hath need even of racks to draw out confessions; and scarce in death itself, are we wrought to a discovery of our errors.

There is no one thing, wherein our folly shows itself more, than in these hurtful concealments. Contrary to the proceedings of human justice, it is with God, 'Confess, and live.' No sooner can David say, 'I have sinned,' than Nathan infers, 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin.' 'He that hides his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.' Who would not accuse himself, to be acquitted of God? O God, who would not tell his wickedness to thee, that knowest it better than his own heart, that his heart may be eased of that wickedness, which being not told killeth? Since we have sinned, why should we be niggardly of that action, wherein we may at once give glory to thee, and relief to our souls?

David had sworn, in a zeal of justice, that the rich oppressor, for but taking his poor neighbor's lamb, should die the death: God, by Nathan, is more favorable to David, than to take him at his word; 'Thou shalt not die.' Oh the marvellous power of repentance! Besides adultery, David had shed the blood of innocent Uriah. The strict law was, 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth; he, that smiteth with the sword, shall perish with the sword.' Yet, as if a penitent confession had dispensed with the rigor of justice, now God says, 'Thou shalt not die.' David was the voice of the Law, awarding death unto sin; Nathan was the voice of the Gospel, awarding life unto the repentance for sin. Whatsoever the sore be, never any soul applied this remedy, and died; never any soul escaped death, that applied it not.

David himself shall not die for this fact; but his misbegotten child shall die for him. He, that said, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin,' yet said also, 'The sword shall not depart from thine house.' The same mouth, with one breath, pronounces the sentence both of abso-

lution to the person, death to the issue. Pardon may well stand with temporal afflictions. Where God hath forgiven, though he doth not punish, yet he may chastise, and that unto blood; neither doth he always forbear correction, where he remits revenge. So long as he smites us not as an angry judge, we may endure to smart from him as a loving father.

Yet even this rod did David deprecate with tears. How fain would he shake off so easy a load! The child is stricken: the father fasts, and prays, and weeps, and lies all night on the earth, and abhors the noise of comfort. That child, which was the fruit and monument of his odious adultery, whom he could never have looked on without recognition of his sin, in whose face he could not but have still read the records of his own shame, is thus mourned for, thus sued for. It is easy to observe that good man over-passionately affected to his children. Who would not have thought, that David might have held himself well appayed, that his soul escaped an eternal death, his body a violent, though God should punish his sin, in that child, in whom he sinned? yet even against this cross he bends his prayers, as if nothing had been forgiven him. There is no child that would be scourged, if he might escape for crying. No affliction is for the time other than grievous; neither is therefore yielded unto, without some kind of reluctance.

Far yet was it from the heart of David, to make any opposition to the will of God: he sued; he struggled not. There is no impatience in entreaties. He well knew, that the threats of temporal evils ran commonly with a secret condition, and therefore might perhaps be avoided by humble importunity. If any means under heaven can avert judgments, it is our prayers.

God could not choose but like well the boldness of David's faith; who, after the apprehension of so heavy a displeasure, is so far from doubting of the forgiveness of his sin, that he dares become a suitor unto God for his sick child. Sin doth not make us more strange, than faith confident.

But it is not in the power of the strongest faith, to preserve us from all afflictions. After all David's prayers

and tears, the child must die. The careful servants dare but whisper this sad news. They, who had found their master so averse from the motion of comfort in the sickness of the child, feared him incapable of comfort in his death.

Suspicion is quick-witted. Every occasion makes us misdoubt that event, which we fear. This secresy proclaims that, which they were so loath to utter. David perceives his child dead; and now he rises up from the earth whereon he lay, and washes himself, and changeth his apparel, and goes first into God's house to worship, and into his own to eat; now he refuses no comfort, who before would take none. The issue of things doth more fully show the will of God, than the prediction. God never did any thing, but what he would. He hath sometimes foretold that for trial, which his secret will intended not. He would foretell it; he would not effect it; because he would therefore foretell it, that he might not effect it. His predictions of outward evils are not always absolute; his actions are. David well sees by the event, what the decree of God was concerning his child; which now he could not strive against, without a vain impatience. Till we know the determinations of the Almighty, it is free for us to strive in our prayers; to strive with him, not against him: when once we know them, it is our duty to sit down in a silent contentation.

'While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell, whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live! but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again?'

The grief, that goes before an evil for remedy, can hardly be too much; but that, which follows an evil past remedy, cannot be too little. Even in the saddest accident, death, we may yield something to nature, nothing to impatience. Immoderation of sorrow, for losses past hope of recovery, is more sullen than useful; our stomach may be bewrayed by it, not our wisdom.—2 Sam. xii.

AMNON AND TAMAR.

It is not possible, that any word of God should fall to the ground. David is not more sure of forgiveness, than

smart. Three main sins passed him in this business of Uriah; adultery, murder, dissimulation: for all which he receives present payment; for adultery, in the deflowering of his daughter Tamar; for murder, in the killing of his son Amnon; for dissimulation, in the contriving of both. Yet all this was but the beginning of evils. Where the father of the family brings sin home to the house, it is not easily swept out. Unlawful lust propagates itself by example. How justly is David scourged by the sin of his sons, whom his act taught to offend!

Maachah was the daughter of a heathenish king. By her had David that beautiful but unhappy issue, Absalom, his no less fair sister, Tamar. Perhaps, thus late doth David feel the punishment of that unfit choice. I should have marvelled, if so holy a man had not found crosses in so unequal a match; either in his person, or at least in his seed.

Beauty, if it be not well disciplined, proves not a friend, but a traitor. Three of David's children are undone by it at once. What else was guilty of Amnon's incestuous love, Tamar's ravishment, Absalom's pride? It is a blessing to be fair; yet such a blessing, as, if the soul answer not to the face, may lead to a curse. How commonly have we seen the foulest soul dwell fairest!

It was no fault of Tamar's, that she was beautiful: the candle offends not in burning; the foolish fly offends not in scorching itself in the flame: yet it is no small misery to become a temptation unto another, and to be made but the occasion of others' ruin.

Amnon is love-sick of his sister Tamar, and languishes of that unnatural heat. Whither will not wanton lust carry the inordinate minds of pampered and ungoverned youths? None but his half-sister will please the eyes of the young prince of Israel. Ordinary pleasures will not content those, whom the conceit of greatness, youth, and ease, have let loose to their appetite.

Perhaps yet, this unkindly flame might in time have gone out alone, had not there been a Jonadab, to blow these coals with ill counsel. It were strange, if great princes should want some parasitical followers, that are ready to feed their ill humors. 'Why art thou, the king's

son, so lean from day to day?' As if it were unworthy the heir of a king, to suffer either law or conscience to stand in the way of his desires: whereas wise princes know well, that their places give them no privilege of sinning; but call them in rather to so much more strictness, as their example may be more prejudicial.

Jonadab was the cousin-german of Amnon. Ill advice is so much more dangerous, as the interest of the giver is more. Had he been a true friend, he had bent all the forces of his dissuasion against the wicked motions of that sinful lust; and had showed the prince of Israel, how much those lewd desires provoked God and blemished himself; and had lent his hand to strangle them in their first conception. There cannot be a more worthy improvement of friendship, than in a fervent opposition to the sins of them, whom we profess to love. No enemy can be so mortal to great princes, as those officious clients, whose flattery soothes them up in wickedness: these are traitors to the soul, and by a pleasing violence kill the best part eternally.

How ready at hand is an evil suggestion! Good counsel is like unto well-water, that must be drawn up with a pump or bucket; ill counsel is like to conduit-water, which, if the cock be but turned, runs out alone. Jonadab hath soon projected, how Amnon shall accomplish his lawless purpose. The way must be to feign himself sick in body, whose mind was sick of lust; and, under this pretence, to procure the presence of her, who had wounded, and only might cure him. The daily increasing languor, and leanness, and paleness, of love-sick Amnon, might well give color to a kerchief and a pallet.

Now is it soon told David, that his eldest son is cast on his sick bed. There needs no suit for his visitation. The careful father hastens to his bedside; not without doubts and fears. He, that was lately so afflicted, with the sickness of a child that scarce lived to see the light, how sensible must we needs think he would be, of the indisposition of his first-born son, in the prime of his age and hopes!

It is not given to any prophet, to foresee all things. Happy had it been for David, if Amnon had been truly

sick, and sick unto death; yet who could have persuaded this passionate father, to have been content with this succession of losses, this early loss of his successor? How glad is he to hear, that his daughter Tamar's skill might be likely to fit the diet of so dear a patient! Conceit is wont to rule much, both in sickness and in the cure.

Tamar is sent by her father to the house of Amnon. Her hand only must dress that dish, which may please the nice palate of her sick brother. Even the children of kings, in those homelier times, did not scorn to put their fingers to some works of huswifery; 'She took flour, and did knead it, and did make cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes, and took a pan, and poured them out before him.' Had she not been sometimes used to such domestic employments, she had been now to seek; neither had this been required of her, but on the knowledge of her skill. She doth not plead the impairing of her beauty by the scorching of the fire; nor thinks her hand too dainty for such mean services; but settles to the work, as one that would rather regard the necessities of her brother, than her own state. Only pride and idleness have banished honest and thrifty diligence out of the houses of the great.

This was not yet the dish that Amnon longed for. It was the cook, and not the cates, which that wanton eye affected. Unlawful acts seek for secresy. The company is dismissed; Tamar only stays. Good meaning suspects nothing. While she presents the meat she had prepared to her sick brother, herself is made a prey to his outrageous lust. The modest virgin entreats and persuades in vain. She lays before him the sin, the shame, the danger, of the fact; and, since none of these can prevail, fain would win time, by the suggestion of impossible hopes. Nothing but violence can stay a resolved sinner: what he cannot by entreaty, he will have by force. If the devil were not more strong in men, than nature, they would never seek pleasure in violence.

Amnon hath no sooner fulfilled his beastly desires, than he hates Tamar more than he loved her. Inordinate lust never ends but in discontentment. Loss of spirits

and remorse of soul make the remembrance of that act tedious, whose expectation promised delight. If we could see the back of sinful pleasures, ere we behold their face, our hearts could not but be forestalled with a just detestation. Brutish Amnon, it was thyself, whom thou shouldst have hated for this villany, not thine innocent sister. Both of you lay together; only one committed incest. What was she, but a patient in that impotent fury of lust? How unjustly do carnal men misplace their affections! No man can say, whether that love or this hatred were more unreasonable. Fraud drew Tamar into the house of Amnon; force entertained her within, and drove her out. Fain would she have hid her shame where it was wrought, and may not be allowed it. That roof, under which she came with honor, and in obedience and love, may not be lent her for the time as a shelter of her ignominy. Never any savage could be more barbarous. Shechem had ravished Dinah: his offence did not make her odious: his affection so continued, that he is willing rather to draw blood of himself and his people, than forego her whom he had abused. Amnon, in one hour, is in the excess of love and hate; and is sick of her, for whom he was sick. She, that lately kept the keys of his heart, is now locked out of his doors. Unruly passions run ever into extremities; and are then best appayed, when they are furthest off from reason and moderation.

What could Amnon think would be the event of so foul a fact; which, as he had not the grace to prevent, so he hath not the care to conceal? If he looked not so high as heaven, what could he imagine would follow hereon, but the displeasure of a father, the danger of law, the indignation of a brother, the shame and outcries of the world? All which he might have hoped to avoid, by secresy and plausible courses of satisfaction. It is the just judgment of God on presumptuous offenders, that they lose their wit, together with their honesty; and are either so blinded, that they cannot foresee the issue of their actions, or so besotted that they do not regard it.

Poor Tamar can but bewail that which she could not keep, her virginity; not lost, but torn from her by a cruel violence. She rends her princely robe, and lays ashes

on her head, and laments the shame of another's sin, and lives more desolate than a widow in the house of her brother Absalom.

In the mean time, what a corrosive must this news need be to the heart of good David; whose fatherly command had, out of love, cast his daughter into the jaws of this lion! What an insolent affront must he needs construe this, to be offered by a son to a father; that the father should be made the pander of his own daughter to his son! He, that lay on the ground weeping for but the sickness of an infant, how vexed do we think he was with the villany of his heir, with the ravishment of his daughter; both of them worse than many deaths! What revenge can he think of for so heinous a crime, less than death; and what less than death is it to him, to think of a revenge? Rape was by the law of God, capital; how much more, when it is seconded with incest! Anger was not punishment enough for so high an offence: yet this is all that I hear of, from so indulgent a father; saving that he makes up the rest with sorrow, punishing his son's outrage in himself. The better natured and more gracious a man is, the more subject he is to the danger of an over-remissness, and the excess of favor and mercy. The mild injustice is no less perilous to the commonwealth, than the cruel.

If David (perhaps out of the conscience of his own late offence) will not punish this fact, his son Absalom shall; not out of any care of justice, but in a desire of revenge. Two whole years, hath this sly courtier smothered his indignation, and feigned kindness; else his invitation of Amnon in special had been suspected.

Even gallant Absalom was a great sheep-master. The bravery and magnificence of a courtier must be built on the grounds of frugality.

David himself is bidden to this bloody sheep-shearing. It was no otherwise meant, but that the father's eyes should be the witnesses of the tragical execution of one son by another. Only David's love kept him from that horrible spectacle. He is careful, not to be chargeable to that son, who cares not to overcharge his father's stomach with a feast of blood.

Amnon hath so quite forgot his sin, that he dares go

to feast in that house, where Tamar was mourning; and suspects not the kindness of him, whom he had deserved, of a brother to make an enemy. Nothing is more unsafe to be trusted, than the fair looks of a festered heart. Where true charity or just satisfaction have not wrought a sound reconciliation, malice doth but lurk for the opportunity of an advantage.

It was not for nothing, that Absalom deferred his revenge; which is now so much more exquisite, as it is longer protracted. What could be more fearful, than when Ammon's heart was merry with wine, to be suddenly stricken with death? As if this execution had been no less intended to the soul, than to the body. How wickedly soever this was done by Absalom, yet how just was it with God, that he, who, in two years' impunity, would find no leisure of repentance, should now receive a punishment, without possibility of repentance!

O God, thou art righteous to reckon for those sins, which human partiality or negligence hath omitted; and, while thou punishest sin with sin, to punish sin with death. If either David had called Ammon to account for this villany, or Amnon had called himself, the revenge had not been so desperate. Happy is the man, that, by an unfeigned repentance, acquits his soul from his known evils, and improves the days of his peace to the prevention of future vengeance; which, if it be not done, the hand of God shall as surely overtake us in judgment, as the hand of Satan hath overtaken us in miscarriage unto sin.—2 Samuel xiii.

ABSALOM'S RETURN AND CONSPIRACY.

One act of injustice draws on another. The injustice of David, in not punishing the rape of Amnon, procures the injustice of Absalom, in punishing Amnon with murder. That, which the father should have justly revenged, and did not, the son revenges unjustly.

The rape of a sister was no less worthy of death, than the murder of a brother; yea, this latter sin was therefore the less, because that brother was worthy of death, though by another hand; whereas that sister was guilty of nothing, but modest beauty: yet he, that knew this rape passed over two whole years with impunity, dares not

trust the mercy of a father, in the pardon of his murder; but for three years hides his head in the court of his grandfather, the king of Geshur. Doubtless, that heathenish prince gave him a kind welcome, for so meritorious a revenge of the dishonor done to his own loins.

No man can tell, how Absalom should have sped from the hands of his otherwise over-indulgent father, if he had been apprehended in the heat of the fact. Even the largest love may be overstrained, and may give a fall in the breaking. These fearful effects of lenity might perhaps have whetted the severity of David, to shut up these outrages in blood. Now, this displeasure was weakened with age. Time and thoughts have digested this hard morsel. David's heart told him, that his hands had a share in this offence; that Absalom did but give that stroke, which himself had wrongfully forborne; that the irrecoverable loss of one son, would be but wofully relieved with the loss of another; he therefore, that, in the news of the deceased infant, could change his clothes, and wash himself, and cheer up his spirits, with the resolution of, 'I shall go to him, he shall not return to me,' comforts himself concerning Amnon; and begins to long for Absalom.

Those three years' banishment seemed not so much a punishment to the son, as to the father. Now David begins to forgive himself; yet out of his wisdom, so inclines to favor, that he conceals it; and yet so conceals it, that it may be descried by a cunning eye. If he had cast out no glances of affection, there had been no hopes for his Absalom; if he had made profession of love after so foul an act, there had been no safety for others: now he lets fall so much secret grace, as may both hold up Absalom in the life of his hopes, and not hearten the presumption of others.

Good eyes see light through the smallest chink. The wit of Joab hath soon discerned David's reserved affection; and knows how to serve him in that which he would, and would not accomplish: and now devises, how to bring into the light that birth of desire, whereof he knew David was both big and ashamed. A woman of Tekoah (that sex hath ever been more apt for wiles) is suborned to personate a mourner, and to say that, by way of parable,

which in plain terms would have sounded too harshly; and now, while she lamentably lays forth the loss and danger of her sons, she shows David his own; and while she moves compassion to her pretended issue, she wins David to a pity of himself, and a favorable sentence for Absalom. We love ourselves better than others; but we see others better than ourselves. Whoso would perfectly know his own case, let him view it in another person's.

Parables sped well with David. One drew him to repent of his own sin; another, to remit Absalom's punishment: and now, as glad to hear this plea, and willing to be persuaded unto that which if he durst he would have sought for, he gratifies Joab with the grant of that suit, which Joab more gratified him in suing for; 'Go, bring again the young man Absalom.'

How glad is Joab, that he hath lit on one act, for which the sun, both setting and rising, should shine on him! And now he speeds to Geshur, to fetch back Absalom to Jerusalem. He may bring the long-banished prince to the city; but to the court he may not bring him; 'Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face.'

The good king hath so smarted with mercy, that now he is resolved on austerity; and will relent but by degrees. It is enough for Absalom, that he lives, and may now breathe in his native air: David's face is no object for the eyes of murderers. What a darling this son was to his father appears, in that, after an unnatural and barbarous rebellion, passionate David wishes to have changed lives with him; yet now, while his bowels yearned, his brow frowned. The face may not be seen, where the heart is set.

The best of God's saints may be blinded with affection; but when they shall once see their errors, they are careful to correct them. Wherefore serves the power of grace, but to subdue the insolencies of nature? It is the wisdom of parents, as to hide their hearts from their best children, so to hide their countenances from the ungracious. Fleshly respects may not abate their rigor to the ill-deserving. For the child to see all his father's love, it is enough to make him wanton; and of wanton, wicked: for a wicked child, to see any of his father's love, it emboldens him in evil, and draws on others.

Absalom's house is made his prison. Justly is he confined to the place, which he had stained with blood. Two years doth he live in Jerusalem, without the happiness of his father's sight. It was enough for David and him, to see the smoke of each other's chimnies. In the mean time, how impatient is Absalom of this absence! He sends for Joab, the solicitor of his return. So hard a hand doth wise and holy David carry over his reduced son, that his friendly intercessor, Joab, dares not visit him.

He, that afterwards kindled that seditious fire over all Israel, sets fire now on the field of Joab. Whom love cannot draw to him, fear and anger shall.

Continued displeasure hath made Absalom desperate. Five years are passed, since he saw the face of his father; and now he is no less weary of his life, than of this delay; 'Wherefore am I come down from Geshur? It had been better for me, to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.' Either banishment or death seemed as tolerable to him, as the debarring of his father's sight.

What a torment shall it be, to the wicked, to be shut out for ever, from the presence of a God, without all possible hopes of recovery! This was but a father of the flesh, by whom, if Absalom lived at first, yet in him he lived not; yea, not without him only, but against him, that son found he could live; God is the Father of spirits, in whom we so live, that without him can be no life, no being. To be ever excluded from him, in whom we live and are, what can it be but an eternal dying, an eternal perishing? If in thy presence, O God, be the fulness of joy, in thine absence, must needs be the fulness of horror and torment. Hide not thy face from us, O Lord, but show us the light of thy countenance, that we may live and praise thee.

Even the fire of Joab's field warmed the heart of David, while it gave him proof of the heat of Absalom's filial affection. As a man therefore inwardly weary of so long displeasure, at last he receives Absalom to his sight, to his favor: and seals his pardon with a kiss. Natural parents know not how to retain an everlasting anger towards the fruit of their loins; how much less shall the God of mercies be unreconcilably displeased with his own, and suffer his wrath to burn like fire that cannot be quenched!

'He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. His wrath endureth but a moment. In his favor is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

Absalom is now as great as fair. Beauty and greatness make him proud; pride works his ruin. Great spirits will not rest content with a moderate prosperity. Ere two years be run out, Absalom runs out into a desperate plot of rebellion; none but his own father was above him in Israel. None was so likely, in human expectation, to succeed his father. If his ambition could but have contained itself for a few years, as David was now near his period, dutiful carriage might have procured that by succession, which now he sought by force. An aspiring mind is ever impatient, and holds time itself an enemy, if it thrust itself importunately betwixt the hopes and fruition. Ambition is never but in travail; and can find no intermission of painful throes, till she have brought forth her abortive desires. How happy were we, if our affectation could be so eager of spiritual and heavenly promotions! Oh that my soul could find itself so restless, till it feel the weight of that crown of glory!

Outward pomp and unwonted shows of magnifience, are wont much to affect the light minds of the vulgar. Absalom therefore, to the incomparable comeliness of his person, adds the unusual state of a more than princely equipage. His chariots rattle, and his horses trample proudly in the streets. Fifty footmen run before their glittering master. Jerusalem rings of their glorious prince; and is ready to adore these continual triumphs of peace.

Excess and novelty of expensive bravery and ostentation in public persons, give just cause to suspect either vanity or a plot. True-hearted David can misdoubt nothing in him, to whom he had both given life, and forgiven this. Love construed all this, as meant to the honor of a father's court, to the expression of joy and thankfulness for his reconcilement.

The eyes and tongues of men are thus taken up: now hath Absalom laid snares for their hearts also. 'He rises early, and stands beside the way of the gate;' Ambition is no niggard of her pains; seldom ever is good meaning so

industrious: the more he shined in beauty and royal attendance, so much more glory it was to neglect himself, and to prefer the care of justice to his own case. Neither is Absalom more painful than plausible. His ear is open to all plaintives, all petitioners. There is no cause which he flatters; 'See, thy matters are good and right.' His hand flatters every comer with a salutation, his lips with a kiss. All men, all matters are soothed, saving the state and government: the censure of that is no less deep, than the applause of all others; 'There is none deputed of the king to hear thee.' What insinuations could be more powerful? No music can be so sweet to the ears of the unstable multitude, as to hear well of themselves, ill of their governors. Absalom needs not to wish himself on the bench. Every man says, 'Oh, what a curious prince is Absalom! What a just and careful ruler would Absalom be! How happy were we, if we might be judged by Absalom! Those qualities which are wont singly to grace others, have conspired to meet in Absalom; goodliness of person, magnificence of state, gracious affability, unwearied diligence, humility in greatness, feeling pity, love of justice, care of the commonwealth. The world hath not so complete a prince as Absalom.' Thus the hearts of the people are not won, but stolen, by a close traitor, from their lawfully anointed sovereign.

Over-fair shows are a just argument of unsoundness. No natural face hath so clear a white and red, as the painted. Nothing wants now but a cloak of religion, to perfect the treachery of that ungracious son, who carried peace in his name, war in his heart: and how easily is that put on! Absalom hath a holy vow to be paid in Hebron! The devout man had made it long since, while he was exiled in Syria; and now he hastes to perform it; 'If the Lord shall bring me back again to Jerusalem, then will I serve the Lord.' Wicked hypocrites care not to play with God, that they may mock men. The more deformed any act is, the fairer visor it still seeketh.

How glad is the good old king, that he is blessed with so godly a son; whom he dismisseth laden with his causeless blessings! What trust is there in flesh and blood, when David is not safe from his own loins?

The conspiracy is now fully forged, there lacked nothing but this guilt of piety to win favor and value in all eyes; and now it is a wonder, that but two hundred honest citizens go up with Absalom from Jerusalem. The true-hearted lie most open to credulity. How easy it is to beguile harmless intentions! The name of David's son carries them against the father of Absalom; and now these simple Israelites are unwittingly made loyal rebels. Their hearts are free from a plot, and they mean nothing but fidelity, in the attendance of a traitor. How many thousands are thus ignorantly misled into the train of error! Their simplicity is as worthy of pity, as their misguidance of indignation. Those, that will suffer themselves to be carried with semblances of truth and faithfulness, must needs be as far from safety as innocence.—2 Sam. xiv.

BOOK XVI.

SHIMEI CURSING.

With a heavy heart, and a covered head, and a weeping eye, and bare feet, is David gone away from Jerusalem. Never did he with more joy come up to this city, than now he left it with sorrow: how could he do otherwise, whom the insurrection of his own son drove out from his house, from his throne, from the ark of God?

And now, when the depth of this grief deserved nothing but compassion, the foul mouth of Shimei entertains David with curses. There is no small cruelty, in the picking out of a time for mischief. That word would scarce gall at one season, which at another killeth. The same shaft, flying with the wind, pierces deep, which against it, can hardly find strength to stick upright. The valor and justice of children condemn it for injuriously cowardly, to strike their adversary when he is once down. It is the murder of the tongue, to insult on those whom God hath humbled, and to draw blood of that back, which is yet blue from the hand of the Almighty. If Shimei had not presumed on David's dejection, he durst not have been

thus bold; now, he, that perhaps durst not have looked at one of those worthies single, defies them all at once, and doth both cast and speak stones against David and all his army. The malice of base spirits sometimes carries them further, than the courage of the valiant.

In all the time of David's prosperity, we heard no news of Shimei: his silence and colorable obedience made him pass for a great subject; yet all that while was his heart unsound and traitorous. Peace and good success hide many a false heart, like as the snow-drift covers a heap of dung, which, once melting away, descries the rottenness that lay within. Honor and welfare are but flattering glasses of men's affections. Adversity will not deceive us; but will make a true report, as of our own powers, so of the disposition of others.

He, that smiled on David in his throne, curseth him in his flight. If there be any quarrels, any exceptions to be taken against a man, let him look to have them laid in his dish, when he fares the hardest. This practice have wicked men learned of their master, to take the utmost advantages of our afflictions. He that suffers had need to be double armed, both against pain and censure.

Every word of Shimei was a slander: he, that took Saul's spear from his head, and repented to have cut the lap of his garment, is reproached as a man of blood: the man after God's own heart is branded for a man of Belial. He, that was sent for out of the fields to be anointed, is taxed for a usurper. If David's hand were stained with blood, yet not of Saul's house; it was his servant, not his master, that bled by him; yet is the blood of the Lord's anointed cast in David's teeth, by the spite of a false tongue. Did we not see David, after all the proofs of his humble loyalty, shedding the blood of that Amalekite, who did but say he shed Saul's? Did we not hear him lament passionately for the death of so ill a master, chiding the mountains of Gilboa on which he fell, and angrily wishing that no dew might fall where that blood was poured out; and charging the daughters of Israel to weep over Saul, who had clothed them in scarlet? Did we not hear and see him inquiring for any remainder of Saul, that he might show him the kindness of God? Did

we not see him honoring lame Mephibosheth, with a princely seat at his own table? Did we not see him revenging the blood of his rival Ishbosheth, on the heads of Rechab and Baanah? What could any living man have done more, to wipe off these bloody aspersions? Yet is not a Shimei ashamed to charge innocent David, with all the blood of the house of Saul. How is it likely this clamorous wretch had secretly traduced the name of David, all the time of his government, that dares thus accuse him to his face, before all the mighty men of Israel, who were witnesses of the contrary!

The greater the person is, the more open do his actions lie to misinterpretation and censure. Every tongue speaks partially, according to the interest he hath in the cause, or the patient. It is not possible, that eminent persons should be free from imputations: innocence can no more protect them, than power.

If the patience of David can digest this indignity, his train cannot. Their fingers could not but itch, to return iron for stones. If Shimei rail on David, Abishai rails on Shimei. Shimei is of Saul's family; Abishai of David's: each speaks for his own. Abishai most justly bends his tongue against Shimei, as Shimei against David most unjustly. Had Shimei been any other than a dog, he had never so rudely barked at a harmless passenger; neither could he deserve less than the loss of that head, which had uttered such blasphemies against God's anointed. The zeal of Abishai doth but plead for justice, and is checked; 'What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?' David said not so much to his reviler, as to his abettor. He well saw, that a revenge was just, but not seasonable. He found the present a fit time, to suffer wrongs, not to right them; he therefore gives way rather meekly to his own humiliation, than to the punishment of another. There are seasons wherein lawful motions are not fit to be cherished: anger doth not become a mourner: one passion at once is enough for the soul. Unadvised zeal may be more prejudicial, than a cold remissness.

What if the Lord, for the correction of his servant, have said unto Shimei, 'Curse David;' yet is Shimei's curse no

less worthy of Abishai's sword. The sin of Shimei's curse was his own; the smart of the curse was God's. God wills that as David's chastisement which he hates as Shimei's wickedness. That lewd tongue moved from God; it moved lewdly from Satan. Wicked men are never the freer from guilt or punishment, for that hand which the holy God hath in their offensive actions. Yet David can say, 'Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him;' as meaning to give a reason of his own patience, rather than Shimei's impunity. The issue showed, how well David could distinguish betwixt the act of God and of a traitor; how he could both kiss the rod, and burn it. There can be none so strong motive of our meek submission to evils, as the acknowledgment of their original. He, that can see the hand of God striking him by the hand or tongue of an enemy, shall more awe the first mover of his arm, than malign the instrument.

Even while David laments the rebellion of his son, he gains by it; and makes that the argument of his patience, which was the exercise of it; 'Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it?' The wickedness of an Absalom may rob his father of comfort, but shall help to add to his father's goodness. It is the advantage of great crosses, that they swallow up the less. One man's sin cannot be excused by another's; the lesser, by the greater; if Absalom be a traitor, Shimei may not curse and rebel: but the passion conceived from the indignity of a stranger, may be abated by the harder measure of our own. If we can therefore suffer, because we have suffered, we have profited by our affliction. A weak heart faints with every addition of succeeding trouble: the strong recollects itself; and is grown so skilful, that it bears off one mischief with another.

It is not either the unnatural insurrection of Absalom, nor the unjust curses of Shimei, that can put David quite out of heart; 'It may be, that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and will requite good for his cursing this day.' So well was David acquainted with the proceedings of God, that he knew cherishing was ever wont to follow

stripes; after vehement evacuation, cordials; after a dark night, the clear light of the morning: hope therefore doth not only uphold, but cheer up his heart, in the midst of his sorrow. If we can look beyond the cloud of our affliction, and see the sunshine of comfort on the other side of it, we cannot be so discouraged with the presence of evil, as heartened with the issue; as, on the contrary, let a man be never so merry within, and see pain and misery waiting for him at the door, his expectation of evil shall easily daunt all the sense of his pleasure. The retributions of temporal favors go but by peradventures; 'It may be, the Lord will look on mine affliction;' of eternal, are certain and infallible. 'If we suffer, we shall reign:' why should not the assurance of reigning make us triumph in suffering?

David's patience draws on the insolence of Shimei. Evil natures grow presumptuous on forbearance: in good dispositions, injury unanswered grows weary of itself, and dies in a voluntary remorse; but in those dogged stomachs, which are only capable of the restraints of fear, the silent digestion of a former wrong provokes a second. Mercy had need to be guided with wisdom, lest it prove cruel to itself.

Oh the base minds of inconstant time-servers! Stay but awhile, till the wheel be a little turned, you shall see humble Shimei fall down on his face before David, in his return over Jordan: now, his submission shall equal his former rudeness; his prayers shall requite his curses; his tears make amends for his stones; 'Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me: neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely, the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart; for thy servant doth know that I have sinned.' False-hearted Shimei! had Absalom prospered, thou hadst not sinned; thou hadst not repented: then hadst thou bragged of thine insultation over his miseries, whose pardon thou now beggest with tears. The changes of worldly minds are thankless, since they are neither wrought out of conscience nor love, but only by slavish fear of just punishment.

David could say no more to testify his sorrow for his

heinous sins against God to Nathan, than Shimei says of himself to David; whereto may be added the advantage of a voluntary confession in this offender, which in David was extorted by the reproof of a prophet: yet is David's confession seriously penitent; Shimei's, craftily hypocritical. Those alterations are justly suspected, which are shaped according to the times and outward occasions: the true penitent looks only at God and his sin, and is changed when all others things are themselves.

Great offences had need of answerable satisfaction. As Shimei was the only man of the house of Benjamin that came forth and cursed David in his flight, so is he the first man (even before those of Joseph, though nearer in situation) that comes to meet David in his return with prayers and gratulations. Notorious offenders may not think to sit down, with the task of ordinary services. The retributions of their obedience must be proportionable to their crimes.—2 Samuel xvi.

AHITOPHEL.

So soon as David heard of Ahitophel's hand in that conspiracy, he falls to his prayers; 'O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness.' The known wisdom of his revolted counsellor, made him a dangerous and dreadful adversary. Great parts misemployed cannot but prove most mischievous. When wickedness is armed with wit and power, none but a God can defeat it: when we are matched with a strong and subtle enemy, it is high time, if ever, to be devout: if the bounty of God have thought good to furnish his creatures with powers to war against himself, his wisdom knows how to turn the abuse of those powers to the shame of the owners, and the glory of the giver.

Oh the policy of this Machiavel of Israel, no less deep than hell itself; "Go in to thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and when all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father, the hands of all that are with thee shall be strong.' The first care must be to secure the faction. There can be no safety, in siding with a doubtful rebel. If Absalom be a traitor, yet he is a son. Nature may return to itself: Ab-

salom may relent; David may remit: where then are we, that have helped to promote the conspiracy? The danger is ours, while this breach may be pieced. There is no way, but to engage Absalom in some further act, incapable of forgiveness. Besides the throne, let him violate the bed of his father: unto his treason, let him add an incest, no less unnatural: now shall the world see, that Absalom neither hopes nor cares for the reconciliation of a father. Our quarrel can never have any safe end but victory; the hope whereof depends on the resolution of our followers: they cannot be resolute, but on the unpardonable wickedness of their leader. Neither can this villany be shameful enough, if it be secret. The closeness of evil argues fear or modesty; neither of which can beseem him that would be a successful traitor: set up a tent on the top of the house, and let all Israel be witnesses of thy sin, and thy father's shame. Ordinary crimes are for vulgar offenders: let Absalom sin eminently; and do that, which may make the world at once to blush and wonder.'

Who would ever have thought, that Ahitophel had lived at court, at the council-table of a David? Who would think, that mouth had ever spoken well? Yet had he been no other than as the oracle of God, to the religious court of Israel; even while he was not wise enough to be good. Policy and grace are not always lodged under one roof. This man, while he was one of David's deep counsellors, was one of David's fools, that said in their hearts, 'There is no God:' else he could not have hoped to make good an evil with worse, to build the success of treason on incest. Profane hearts do so contrive the plots of their wickedness, as if there were no overruling power, to cross their designs, or to revenge them. He that sits in heaven laughs them to scorn; and so far gives way to their sins, as their sins may prove plagues unto themselves.

These two sons of David met with pestilent counsel: Amnon is advised to incest with his sister; Absalom is advised to incest with his father's concubines: that by Jonadab; this by Ahitophel. Both prevail. It is as easy, at least, to take ill counsel, as to give it. Proneness to

villany in the great, cannot want either projectors to devise, or parasites to execute, the most odious sins.

The tent is spread, lest it should not be conspicuous enough, on the top of the house. The act is done, in the sight of all Israel. The filthiness of the sin was not so great, as the impudency of the manner. When the prophet Nathan came with that heavy message of reproof and menace to David, after his sin with Bathsheba, he could say from God, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against thee, out of thine own house; and will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun: for thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before this sun.' The counsel of Ahitophel and the lust of Absalom have fulfilled the judgment of God. Oh the wisdom of the Almighty, that can use the worst evils well, and most justly make the sins of men his executioners!

It was the sin of Reuben, that he defiled his father's bed; yet not in the same height of lewdness. What Reuben did in a youthful wantonness, Absalom did in a malicious despite: Reuben sinned with one, Absalom with ten; Reuben secretly, Absalom in the open eyes of heaven and earth; yet old Jacob could say of Reuben, 'Thou shalt not excel; thy dignity is gone;' while Ahitophel says to Absalom, 'Thy dignity shall arise from incest; climb up to thy father's bed, if thou wilt sit in his throne.' If Ahitophel were a politician, Jacob was a prophet: if the one spake from carnal sense, the other from divine revelation. Certainly, to sin is not the way to prosper: whatever vain fools promise to themselves; 'There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.'

After the rebellion is secured for continuance, the next care is that it may end in victory. This also hath the working head of Ahitophel projected. Wit and experience told him, that, in these cases of assault, celerity uses to bring forth the happiest dispatch; whereas protraction is no small advantage to the defendant. 'Let me,' saith he, 'choose out now twelve thousand men, and I will up, and follow after David this night; and I will come on him,

while he is weary and weak-handed.' No advice could be more pernicious; for, besides the weariness and unreadiness of David and his army, the spirits of that worthy leader were daunted and dejected with sorrow, and offered way to the violence of a sudden assault. The field had been half won, ere any blow stricken. Ahitophel could not have been reputed so wise, if he had not learned the due proportion betwixt actions and times. He, that observeth every wind, shall never sow; but he, that observeth no wind at all, shall never reap.

The likeliest devices do not always succeed. The God, that had appointed to establish David's throne, and determined Solomon to his succession, finds means to cross the plot of Ahitophel, by a less probable advice. Hushai was not sent back for nothing. Where God hath in his secret will decreed any event, he inclines the wills of men to approve that, which may promote his own purposes. Neither had Hushai so deep a head, neither was his counsel so sure, as that of Ahitophel; yet his tongue shall rebel Ahitophel, and divert Absalom. The pretences were fairer, though the grounds were unsound. First, to sweeten his opposition, he yields the praise of wisdom to his adversary in all other counsels, that he may leave to deny it in this; his very contradiction in the present, insinuates a general allowance: then, he suggests certain apparent truths concerning David's valor and skill, to give countenance to the inferences of his improbabilities: lastly, he cunningly feeds the proud humor of Absalom, in magnifying the power and extent of his commands, and ends in the glorious boasts of his fore-promised victory. As it is with faces, so with counsel, that is fair that pleaseth. He, that gives the utterance to words, gives also their speed. Favor, both of speech and men, is not ever according to fore-ordination. The tongue of Hushai, and the heart of Absalom, is guided by a power above their own; Hushai shall therefore prevail with Absalom, that the treason of Absalom may not prevail. He, that worketh all in all things, so disposeth of wicked men and spirits, that, while they do most oppose his revealed will, they execute his secret; and, while they think most to please, they overthrow themselves.

When Absalom first met Hushai returned to Jerusalem, he upbraided him pleasantly, with the scoff of his professed friendship to David; 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' Sometimes there is more truth in the mouth, than in the heart; more in jest, than in earnest. Hushai was a friend; his stay was his kindness: and now he hath done that, for which he was left at Jerusalem; disappointed Ahitophel, preserved David. Neither did his kindness to his friend rest here; but, as one that was justly jealous of him with whom he was allowed to temporize, he mistrusts the approbation of Absalom; and, not daring to put the life of his master on such a hazard, he gives charge to Zadok and Abiathar, of this intelligence unto David. We cannot be too suspicious, when we have to do with those that are faithless. We cannot be too curious of the safety of good princes.

Hushai fears not to descry the secrets of Absalom's counsel. To betray a traitor is no other than a commendable work.

Zadok and Abiathar are fast within the gates of Jerusalem. Their sons lay purposely abroad in the fields. This message, that concerned no less than the life of David, and the whole kingdom of Israel, must be trusted with a maid: sometimes it pleaseth the wisdom of God, who hath the variety of heaven and earth before him, to single out weak instruments for great services; and they shall serve his turn, as well as the best: no counsellor of state could have made this dispatch more effectual.

Jonathan and Ahimaaz are sent, descried, pursued, preserved. The fidelity of a maid instructed them in their message; the subtlety of a woman saved their lives. At the well of Rogel, they received their message; in the well of Bahurim, was their life saved. The sudden wit of a woman hath choked the mouth of her well with dried corn that it might not bewray the messengers.

And now David hears safely of his danger, and prevents it; and though weary with travel and laden with sorrow, he must spend the night in his remove. God's promises of his deliverance and the confirmation of his kingdom, may not make him neglect the means of his safety. If he be faithful, we may not be careless; since our diligence

and care are appointed for the factors of that divine providence. The acts of God must abate nothing of ours; rather must we labor, by doing that which he requireth, to further that which he decreeth.

There are those, that have great wits for the public, none for themselves: such was Ahitophel; who, while he had power to govern a state, could not tell how to rule his own passions. Never till now, do we find his counsel balked; neither was it now rejected as ill, only Hushai's was allowed for better. He can live no longer, now that he is beaten at his own weapon: this alone is cause enough, to saddle his ass; and to go home, and put the halter about his own neck. Pride causes men, both to misinterpret disgraces, and to overrate them.

Now is David's prayer heard: 'Ahitophel's counsel is turned into foolishness.' Desperate Ahitophel! what if thou be not the wisest man of all Israel? Even those, that have not attained to the highest pitch of wisdom, have found contentment in a mediocrity. What if thy counsel were despised? A wise man knows to live happily, in spite of an unjust contempt. What madness is this, to revenge another man's reputation on thyself? And, while thou strivest for the highest room of wisdom, to run into the grossest extremity of folly? Worldly wisdom is no protection from shame and ruin. How easily may a man, though naturally wise, be made weary of life! A little pain, a little shame, a little loss, a small affront, can soon rob a man of all comfort; and cause his own hands, to rob him of himself. If there be not higher respects than the world can yield, to maintain us in being, it should be a miracle, if indignation did not kill more than disease: now, that God, by whose appointment we live here, for his most wise and holy purposes hath found means to make life sweet, and death terrible.

What a mixture do we find here, of wisdom and madness! Ahitophel will needs hang himself; there is madness: he will yet set his house in order; there is an act of wisdom. And could it be possible that he, who was so wise as to set his house in order, should be so mad as to hang himself? that he should be careful to order his house, who regarded not to order his impotent passions? that he should care for his house, who cared not for either

body or soul? How vain it is for a man to be wise, if he be not wise in God! How prosperous are the cares of idle worldlings, that prefer all other things to themselves; and, while they look at what they have in their coffers, forget what they have in their breasts!—2 Sam. xvi. xvii.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

The same God, that raised enmity to David from his own loins, procured him favor from foreigners: strangers shall relieve him, whom his own son persecutes. Here is not a loss, but an exchange of love. Had Absalom been a son of Ammon, and Shobi a son of David, David had found no cause of complaint. If God take with one hand, he gives with another: while that divine bounty serves us in good meat, though not in our own dishes, we have good reason to be thankful. No sooner is David come to Mehaniam, than Barzillai, Macheir, and Shobi, refresh him with provisions. Who ever saw any child of God left utterly destitute? Whosoever be the messenger of our aid, we know whence he comes. Heaven shall want power and earth means, before any of the household of faith shall want maintenance.

He, that formerly was forced to employ his arms for his defence against a tyrannous father-in-law, must now buckle them on against an unnatural son. Now therefore, he musters his men, and ordains his commanders, and marshals his troops; and, since their loyal importunity will not allow the hazard of his person, he at once encourages them by his eye, and restrains them with his tongue; 'Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake.'

How unreasonably favorable are the wars of a father! O holy David, what means this ill-placed love, this unjust mercy; Deal gently with a traitor? but, of all traitors, with a son? of all sons, with an Absalom, the graceless darling of so good a father? and all this 'for my sake,' whose crown, whose blood, he hunts after? For whose sake should Absalom be pursued, if he must be forborne for thine? He was still courteous to thy followers, affable to suitors, plausible to all Israel; only to thee he is cruel. Wherefore are those arms, if the cause of the quarrel must be a motive of mercy? Yet thou sayest, 'Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake.' Even

in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence.

Or, whether shall we not rather think this was done, in type of that unmeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers; and, even while they were at once scorning and killing him, could say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?' If we be sons, we are ungracious, we are rebellious; yet still is our heavenly Father thus compassionately regardful of us. David was not sure of his success. There was great inequality of the number. Absalom's forces were more than double to his. It might have come to the contrary issue, that David should have been forced to say, 'Deal gently with the father of Absalom;' but, in a supposition of that victory, which only the goodness of his cause bid him hope for, he saith, 'Deal gently with the young man Absalom.' As for us, we are never but under mercy: our God needs no advantages to sweep us from the earth, any moment; yet he continues that life and those powers to us, whereby we provoke him: and bids his angels deal kindly with us and bear us in their arms, while we lift up our hands and bend our tongues against Heaven. O mercy past the comprehension of all finite spirits, and only to be conceived by him whose it is! never more resembled by any earthly affection, than by this of his deputy and type; 'Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake.'

The battle is joined. David's followers are but a handfull to Absalom's. How easily may the fickle multitude be transported to the wrong side! What they wanted in abettors, is supplied in the cause. Unnatural ambition draws the sword of Absalom; David's, a necessary and a just defence. They, that in simplicity of heart followed Absalom, cannot in malice of heart persecute the father of Absalom: with what courage could any Israelite draw his sword against a David? Or, on the other side, who can want courage, to fight for a righteous sovereign and father, against the conspiracy of a wicked son?

The God of Hosts, with whom it is all one to save with many or with few, takes part with justice; and lets Israel feel, what it is to bear arms for a traitorous usurper.

The sword devours twenty thousand of them; and the wood devours more than the sword. It must needs be a very universal rebellion, wherein so many perished. What virtue or merits can assure the hearts of the vulgar, when so gracious a prince finds so many revolters?

Let no man look to prosper by rebellion: the very thickets, and stakes, and pits, and wild beasts of the woods, shall conspire to the punishment of traitors. Amongst the rest, see how a fatal oak hath singled out the ringleader of this hateful insurrection; and will at once serve for his hangman and gallows, by one of those spreading arms snatching him away to speedy execution.

Absalom was comely, and he knew it well enough. His hair was no small piece of his beauty, nor matter of his pride. It was his wont, to cut it once a year; not for that it was too long, but too heavy: his heart would have borne it longer, if his neck had not complained. And now, the justice of God hath platted a halter of those locks. Those tresses had formerly hanged loosely dishevelled on his shoulders; now he hangs by them. He had wont to weigh his hair, and was proud to find it so heavy; now his hair poiseth the weight of his body, and makes his burden his torment. It is no marvel, if his own hair turned traitor to him, who durst rise up against his father. That part, which is misused by man to sin, is commonly employed by God to revenge. The revenge, that it worketh for God, makes amends for the offence, whereto it is drawn against God. The very beast whereon Absalom sat, as weary to bear so unnatural a burden, resigns over his load to the tree of justice. There hangs Absalom between heaven and earth, as one that was hated and abandoned both of earth and heaven. As if God meant to prescribe this punishment for traitors, Absalom, Ahitophel, and Judas, die all one death. So let them perish, that dare lift up their hand against God's anointed.

The honest soldier sees Absalom hanging in the oak, and dares not touch him: his hands were held with the charge of David, 'Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.' Joab, on that intelligence, sees him, and smites him with no less than three darts. What the sol-

dier forbore in obedience, the captain doth in zeal: not fearing to prefer his sovereign's safety, to his command; and more tendering the life of a king and peace of his country, than the weak affection of a father. I dare not sit judge, betwixt this zeal and that obedience; betwixt the captain and the soldier: the one was a good subject, the other a good patriot; the one loved the king, the other loved David, and out of love disobeyed; the one meant as well as the other sped.

As if God meant to fulfil the charge of his anointed, without any blame of his subjects, it pleased him to execute that immediate revenge on the rebel, which would have dispatched him without hand or dart. Only the mule and the oak conspired to this execution; but that death would have required more leisure, than it was safe for Israel to give; and still life would give hope of rescue. To cut off all fears, Joab lends the oak three darts to help forward so needful a work of justice.

All Israel did not afford so firm a friend to Absalom as Joab had been. Who but Joab had suborned the witty widow of Tekoah, to sue for the recalling of Absalom, from his three years' exile? Who but he went to fetch him from Geshur to Jerusalem? Who but he fetched him from his house at Jerusalem, whereto he had been two years confined, to the face, to the lips of David? Yet now he, that was his solicitor for the king's favor, is his executioner against the king's charge. With honest hearts, all respects, either of blood or friendship, cease in the case of treason. Well hath Joab forgotten himself to be a friend to him, who had forgotten himself to be a son. Even civilly, the king is our common father; our country our common mother: nature hath no private relations, which should not gladly give place to these. He is neither father, nor son, nor brother, nor friend, that conspires against the common parent. Well doth he, who spake parables for his master's son, now speak darts to his king's enemy; and pierces that heart, which was false to so great a father. Those darts are seconded by Joab's followers: each man tries his weapon on so fair a mark.

One death is not enough for Absalom: he is at once

hanged, shot, mangled, stoned. Justly was he lift up to the oak, who had lift up himself against his father and sovereign: justly he is pierced with darts, who had pierced his father's heart with so many sorrows: justly is he mangled, who hath dismembered and divided all Israel: justly is he stoned, who hath not only cursed, but pursued his own parent.

Now Joab sounds the retreat; and calls off his eager troops from execution, however he knew what his rebellious countrymen had deserved in following an Absalom. Wise commanders know how to put a difference, betwixt the heads of a faction, and the misguided multitude; and can pity the one, while they take revenge on the other.

So did Absalom esteem himself, that he thought it would be a wrong to the world, to want the memorial of so goodly a person. God had denied him sons: how just it was, that he should want a son, who had robbed his father of a son; who would have robbed himself of a father, his father of a kingdom! It had been pity, so poisonous a plant should have been fruitful. His pride shall supply nature: he rears up a stately pillar in the king's dale, and calls it by his own name; that he might live in dead stones, who could not survive in living issue: and now, behold this curious pile ends in a rude heap, which speaks no language, but the shame of that carcass which it covers. Hear this, ye glorious fools, that care not to perpetuate any memory of yourselves to the world, but of ill-deserving greatness. The best of this affectation is vanity; the worst, infamy and dishonor: whereas, 'The memorial of the just shall be blessed;' and, if his humility shall refuse an epitaph, and choose to hide himself under the bare earth, God himself shall engrave his name on the pillar of eternity.

There now lies Absalom in the pit, under a thousand grave-stones, in every of which is written his everlasting reproach. Well might this heap overlive that pillar; for when that ceased to be a pillar, it began to be a heap; neither will it cease to be a monument of Absalom's shame, while there are stones to be found on earth. Even at this day, very pagans and pilgrims that pass that way, cast each man a stone unto that heap; and are wont to

say, in a solemn execration, 'Cursed be the parricide Absalom, and cursed be all unjust persecutors of their parents, for ever.' Fasten your eyes on this woful spectacle, O all ye rebellious and ungracious children, which rise up against the loins and thighs from which ye fell; and know, that it is the least part of your punishment, that your carcasses rot in the earth, and your name in ignominy: these do but shadow out those eternal sufferings of your souls, for your foul and unnatural disobedience.

Absalom is dead. Who shall report it to his father? Surely Joab was not so much afraid of the fact, as of the message. There are busy spirits that love to carry news, though thankless, though purposeless; such as Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, who importunately thrust himself into this service. Wise Joab, who well saw how unwelcome tidings must be the burden of the first post, dissuades him in vain. He knew David too well, to employ a friend to that errand. An Ethiopian servant was a fitter bearer of such a message, than the son of the priest. The entertainment of the person doth so follow the quality of the news, that David could argue afar off, 'He is a good man; he cometh with good tidings.' Oh how welcome deserve those messengers to be, that bring us the glad tidings of salvation; that abuse us of the foil of all spiritual enemies; and tell us of nothing but victories, and crowns, and kingdoms! If we think not their feet beautiful, our hearts are foul with infidelity and secure worldliness.

So wise is Ahimaaz grown by Joab's intimation, that, though he outwent Cushi in his pace, he suffers Cushi to outgo him in his tale; cunningly suppressing that part, which he knew must be most necessarily delivered, and unpleasingly received.

As our care is wont to be where our love is, David's first word is not, 'How fares the host?' but 'How fares the young man Absalom?' Like a wise and faithful messenger, Cushi answers by an honest insinuation; 'The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is;' implying, both what was done, and why David should approve it being done. How is the good king thunder-struck, with that

word of his blackamoor! who, as if he were at once bereaved of all comfort, and cared not to live but in the name of Absalom, goes and weeps and cries out, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee; O Absalom, my son, my son!' What is this we hear? That he, whose life Israel valued at ten thousand of theirs, should be exchanged with a traitor's? That a good king, whose life was sought, should wish to lay it down for the preservation of his murderer? The best men have not wont to be the least passionate. But what shall we say to that love of thine, O Saviour, who hast said of us wretched traitors, not, 'Would God I had died for you;' but 'I will die; I do die; I have died for you?' Oh love, like thyself, infinite, incomprehensible; whereat the angels of Heaven stand yet amazed; wherewith thy saints are ravished. 'Turn away thine eyes from me; for they overcome me. O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause us to hear it; that we may, in our measure, answer thy love, and enjoy it for ever.'—2 Sam. xvii. xviii.

SHEBA'S REBELLION.

It was the doom, which God passed on the man after his own heart, by the mouth of Nathan, that the sword should never depart from his house, for the blood of Uriah: after that wound healed by remission, yet this scar remains; Absalom is no sooner cast down into the pit, than Sheba the son of Bichri is up in arms. If David be not plagued, yet he shall be corrected; first by the rod of a son, then of a subject: he had lift up his hand against a faithful subject; now a faithless dares to lift up his hand against him.

Malice, like some hereditary sickness, runs in a blood: Saul, and Shimei, and Sheba, were all of a house. That ancient grudge was not yet dead. The fire of the house of Jemini was but raked up, never thoroughly out; and now, that, which did but smoke in Shimei, flames in Sheba: although even through this chastisement, it is not hard to discern a type of that perpetual succession of enmity, which should be raised against the true king of Israel. O Son of David, when didst thou ever want ene-

mies? How wert thou designed by thine eternal Father, 'for a sign that should be spoken against!' 'How did the gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things! The kings of the earth assembled, and the rulers came together, against thee.' Yea, how do the subjects of thine own kingdom daily conspire against thee! Even now, while thou enjoyest peace and glory at thy Father's right hand, as soon shalt thou want friends as enemies on earth.

No eye of any traitor could espy a just quarrel in the government of David: yet Sheba blows the trumpet of rebellion; and, while Israel and Judah are striving who should have the greatest part in their re-established sovereign, he sticks not to say, 'We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse;' and, while he says, 'Every man to his tents, O Israel,' he calls every man to his own: so, in proclaiming a liberty from a just and loyal subjection, he invites Israel to the bondage of a usurper.

That a lewd conspirator should breathe treason, it is no wonder; but is it not wonder and shame, that, on every mutinous blast, Israel should turn traitor to God's anointed? It was their late expostulation with David, why their brethren the men of Judah should have stolen him from them; now might David more justly expostulate, why a rebel of their brethren should have stolen them from him.

As nothing is more unstable than the multitude, so nothing is more subject to distastes than sovereignty; for as weak minds seek pleasure in change, so every light conceit of irritation seems sufficient color of change. Such as the false dispositions of the vulgar are, love cannot be security enough for princes, without the awfulness of power. What hold can there be of popularity, when the same hands, that even now fought for David to be all theirs, now fight against him, under the son of Bichri, as none of theirs?

As bees, when they are once up in a swarm, are ready to light on every bough, so the Israelites, being stirred by the late commotion of Absalom, are apt to follow every Sheba. It is unsafe for any state, that the multitude should

once know the way to an insurrection: the least track in this kind is easily made a path.

Yet if Israel rebel, Judah continues faithful; neither shall the Son of David ever be left destitute of some true subjects in the worst of apostacies. He, that could command all hearts, will ever be followed by some. God would rather glorify himself by a remnant.

Great commanders must have active thoughts. David is not so taken up with the embroiled affairs of his state, as not to intend domestic justice. His ten concubines, which were shamelessly defiled by his incestuous son, are condemned to ward and widowhood. Had not that constupration been partly violent, their punishment had not been so easy; had it not also been partly voluntary, they had not been so much punished: but how much soever the act did partake of either force or will, justly are they sequestered from David's bed. Absalom was not more unnatural in his rebellion, than in his lust: if now David should have returned to his own bed, he had seconded the incest. How much more worthy of separation are they, who have stained the marriage-bed with their wilful sin!

Amasa was one of the witnesses and abettors of Absalom's filthiness; yet is he, out of policy, received to favor and employment, while the concubines suffer. Great men yield many times to those things, out of reasons of state, which, if they were private persons, could not be easily put over.

It is no small wisdom, to engage a new reconciled friend, that he may be confirmed by his own act; therefore is Amasa commanded to levy the forces of Judah.

Joab, after many great merits and achievements, lies rusting in neglect: he, that was so intire with David, as to be of his counsel for Uriah's blood, and so firm to David, as to lead all his battles against the house of Saul, the Ammonites, the Aramites, Absalom; is now cashiered, and must yield his place to a stranger late an enemy. Who knows not, that this son of Zeruiah had shed the blood of war in peace? But if the blood of Absalom had not been louder than the blood of Abner, I fear this change

had not been: now Joab smarteth for a loyal disobedience. How slippery are the stations of earthly honors, and subject to continual mutability! Happy are they, who are in favor with him, in whom there is no shadow of change.

Where men are commonly most ambitious to please with their first employments, Amasa slackens his pace. The least delay in matters of rebellion is perilous; may be irrecoverable: the sons of Zeruiah are not sullen: Abishai is sent, Joab goes unsent, to the pursuit of Sheba. Amasa was in their way; whom no quarrel but their envy, had made of a brother an enemy. Had the heart of Amasa been privy to any cause of grudge, he had suspected the kiss of Joab: now his innocent eyes look to the lips, not to the hand, of his secret enemy. The lips were smooth; 'Art thou in health, my brother?' The hand was bloody, which smote him under the fifth rib. That unhappy hand knew well this way unto death; which, with one wound, hath let out the souls of two great captains, Abner and Amasa: both they were smitten by Joab; both under the fifth rib; both under a pretence of friendship. There is no enmity so dangerous as that, which comes masked with love: open hostility calls us to our guard; but there is no fence against a trusted treachery: we need not be bidden to avoid an enemy, but who would run away from a friend? Thus, spiritually, deals the world with our souls: it kisses us, and stabs us, at once. If it did not embrace us with one hand, it could not murder us with the other: only, God, deliver us from the danger of our trust, and we shall be safe.

Joab is gone; and leaves Amasa wallowing in blood. That spectacle cannot but stay all passengers. The death of great persons draws ever many eyes. Each man says; 'Is not this my lord Amasa? Wherefore do we go to fight, while our general lies in the dust? What a sad presage is this of our own miscarriage?' The wit of Joab's followers hath therefore soon both removed Amasa out of the way, and covered him; not regarding so much the loss, as the eyesore of Israel. Thus wicked politics care not so much for the commission of villany, as for the notice. Smothered evils are as not done. If oppressions, if

murder, if treasons, may be hid from view, the obdured heart of the offender complains not of remorse.

Bloody Joab, with what face, with what heart, canst thou pursue a traitor to thy king, while thou thyself art so foul a traitor to thy friend; to thy cousin-german; and, in so unseasonable a slaughter, to thy sovereign, whose cause thou professest to revenge? If Amasa were now, in an act of loyalty, justly, on God's part, paid for the arrearages of his late rebellion, yet that it should be done by thy hand, then and thus, it was flagitiously cruel: yet, behold, Joab runs away securely with the fact; hasting to plague that in another, whereof himself was no less guilty. So vast are the gorges of some consciences, that they can swallow the greatest crimes, and find no strain in the passage.

It is possible, for a man to be faithful to some one person, and perfidious to all others. I do not find Joab other than firm and loyal to David, in the midst of all his private falsehoods; whose just quarrel he pursues against Sheba, through all the tribes of Israel. None of all the strong forts of revolted Israel, can hide the rebel from the zeal of his revenge. The city of Abel lends harbor to that conspirator, whom all Israel would and cannot protect. Joab casts up a mount against it; and, having environed it with a siege, begins to work on the wall; and now, after long chase, is in hand to dig out that vermin, which had earthed himself in this borough of Beth-maachah!

Had not the city been strong and populous, Sheba had not cast himself for succor within those walls; yet, of all the inhabitants, I see not any one man move for the preservation of their whole body: only a woman undertakes to treat with Joab, for their safety. These men, whose spirits were great enough to maintain a traitor against a mighty king, scorn not to give way to the wisdom of a matron. There is no reason, that sex should disparage, where the virtue and merit is no less than masculine. Surely the soul acknowledgeth no sex; neither is varied according to the outward frame. How oft have we known female hearts in the breasts of men; and, contrarily, manly powers in the weaker vessels! It

is injurious, to measure the act by the person, and not rather to esteem the person for the act.

She, with no less prudence than courage, challengeth Joab for the violence of his assault; and lays to him that law, which he could not be an Israelite and disavow; the law of the God of peace, whose charge it was, that when they should come near to a city to fight against it, they should offer it peace; and if this tender must be made to foreigners, how much more to brethren! so as they must inquire of Abel, ere they battered it. War is the extreme act of vindicative justice; neither doth God ever approve it, for any other than a desperate remedy; and if it have any other end than peace, it turns into public murder. It is therefore an inhuman cruelty, to shed blood, where we have not proffered fair conditions of peace; the refusal whereof is justly punished, with the sword of revenge.

Joab was a man of blood; yet when the wise woman of Abel charged him with going about to destroy a mother in Israel, and swallowing up the inheritance of the Lord, with what vehemency doth he deprecate that challenge; 'God forbid, God forbid it me, that I should devour, or destroy it!' Although that city, with the rest, had engaged itself in Sheba's sedition, yet how zealously doth Joab remove from himself the suspicion of an intended vastation! How fearful shall their answer be, who, on the quarrel of their own ambition, have not spared to waste whole tribes of the Israel of God!

It was not the fashion of David's captains, to assault any city ere they summoned it: here they did. There be some things, that, in the very fact, carry their own conviction: so did Abel, in the entertaining and abetting a known conspirator. Joab challengeth them for the offence, and requires no other satisfaction, than the head of Sheba. This matron had not deserved the name of wise and faithful in Israel, if she had not both apprehended the justice of the condition, and commended it to her citizens; whom she had easily persuaded to spare their own heads, in not sparing a traitor's. It had been pity those walls should have stood, if they had been too high to throw a traitor's head over.

Spiritually, the case is ours. Every man's breast is as a city inclosed. Every sin is a traitor, that lurks within those walls. God calls to us for Sheba's head; neither hath he any quarrel to our person, but for our sin. If we love the head of our traitor, above the life of our soul, we shall justly perish in the vengeance. We cannot be more willing to part with our sin, than our merciful God is to withdraw his judgments.

Now is Joab returned with success; and hopes by Sheba's head, to pay the price of Amasa's blood. David hates the murder, entertains the man, defers the revenge. Joab had made himself so great, so necessary, that David may neither miss or punish him. Policy led the king, to connive at that which his heart abhorred. I dare not commend that wisdom, which holds the hands of princes from doing justice. Great men have ever held it a point of worldly state, not always to pay, where they have been conscious to a debt, of either favor or punishment; but to make time their servant for both. Solomon shall once defray the arrearages of his father. In the mean time, Joab commands and prospers; and David is fain to smile on that face, whereon he hath in his secret destination written the characters of death.—2 Sam. xx.

THE GIBEONITES REVENGED.

The reign of David was most troublesome towards the shutting up; wherein, both war and famine conspire to afflict him. Almost forty years, had he sat in the throne of Israel, with competency, if not abundance, of all things; now at last, are his people visited with a long dearth.

We are not at first sensible of common evils. Three years' drought and scarcity are gone over, ere David consults with God, concerning the occasion of the judgment: now he found it high time, to seek the face of the Lord. The continuance of an affliction sends us to God, and calls on us to ask for a reckoning; whereas, like men stricken in their sleep, a sudden blow cannot make us to find ourselves, but rather astonisheth than teacheth us.

David was himself a prophet of God; yet had not the Lord all this while acquainted him with the grounds of his proceedings against Israel. This secret was hid from

him, till he consulted with the Urim: ordinary means shall reveal that to him, which no vision had descried. And if God will have prophets to have recourse unto the priests for the notice of his will, how much more must the people! Even those that are inwardest with God must have use of the ephod.

Justly it is presupposed by David, that there was never judgment from God, where hath not been a provocation from men; therefore, when he sees the plague, he inquires for the sin. Never man smarted causelessly from the hand of divine justice. Oh that when we suffer, we could ask what we have done, and could guide our repentance to the root of our evils!

That God, whose counsels are secret, even where his actions are open, will not be close to his prophet, to his priest. Without inquiry, we shall know nothing; on inquiry, nothing shall be concealed from us, that is fit for us to know.

Who can choose but wonder, at once, both at David's slackness in consulting with God, and God's speed in answering so slow a demand? He, that so well knew the way to God's oracle, suffers Israel to be three years pinched with famine, ere he asks why they suffer. Even the best hearts may be overtaken with dulness in holy duties; but oh, the marvellous mercy of God, that takes not the advantage of our weaknesses!

David's question is not more slow, than his answer is speedy; 'It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.' Israel was full of sins, besides those of Saul's house. Saul's house was full of sins, besides those of blood: much blood was shed by them, besides that of the Gibeonites; yet the justice of God singles out this one sin of violence offered to the Gibeonites, contrary to the league made by Joshua some four hundred years before, for the occasion of this late vengeance. Where the causes of offence are infinite, it is just with God, to pitch on some; it is merciful, not to punish for all.

Well near forty years are past, betwixt the commission of the sin, and the reckoning for it. It is a vain hope, that is raised from the delay of judgment. No time can

be any prejudice to the Ancient of Days: when we have forgotten our sins, when the world hath forgotten us, he sues us afresh for our arrearages.

The slaughter of the Gibeonites was the sin, not of the present, but rather the former generation; and now posterity pays for their forefathers. Even we men hold it not unjust, to sue the heirs and executors of our debtors. Eternal payments, God uses only to require of the person; temporary, ofttimes of succession.

As Saul was higher by the head and shoulders than the rest of Israel, both in stature and dignity, so were his sins more conspicuous than those of the vulgar. The eminence of the person makes the offence more remarkable, to the eyes both of God and men.

Neither Saul nor Israel were faultless in other kinds; yet God fixes the eye of his revenge on the massacre of the Gibeonites. Every sin hath a tongue; but that of blood over-cries and drowns the rest. He, who is mercy itself, abhors cruelty in his creature, above all other inordinateness. That holy soul, which was heavy pressed with the weight of a heinous adultery, yet cries out, 'Deliver me from blood, O God, the God of my salvation; and my tongue shall joyfully sing of thy righteousness.'

If God would take account of blood, he might have entered the action on the blood of Uriah spilt by David; or, if he would rather insist in Saul's house, on the blood of Abimelech the priest, and fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod; but it pleased the wisdom and justice of the Almighty, rather to call for the blood of the Gibeonites, though drudges of Israel, and a remnant of Amorites. Why this? There was a perjury attending on this slaughter. It was an ancient oath, wherein the princes of the congregation had bound themselves, on Joshua's league, to the Gibeonites, that they would suffer them to live; an oath, extorted by fraud, but solemn by no less name than the Lord God of Israel. Saul will now thus late, either not acknowledge it, or not keep it: out of his zeal therefore to the children of Israel and Judah, he roots out some of the Gibeonites; whether in a zeal of revenge of their first imposture, or in a zeal of enlarging the possessions of Israel, or in a zeal of executing

God's charge on the brood of Canaanites. He, that spared Agag whom he should have smitten, smites the Gibeonites whom he should have spared. Zeal and good intention is no excuse, much less a warrant, for evil. God holds it a high indignity, that his name should be sworn by, and violated. Length of time cannot dispense with our oaths, with our vows: the vows and oaths of others may bind us, how much more our own!

There was a famine in Israel. A natural man would have ascribed it unto the drought; and that drought perhaps to some constellations. David knows to look higher; and sees a divine hand scourging Israel for some great offence, and overruling those second causes to his most just executions. Even the most quick-sighted worldling is purblind to spiritual objects, and the weakest eyes of the regenerate pierce the heavens, and espy God in all earthly occurrences.

So well was David acquainted with God's proceedings, that he knew the removal of the judgment must begin at the satisfaction of the wronged. At once therefore, doth he pray unto God, and treat with the Gibeonites; 'What shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord?' In vain should David, though a prophet, bless Israel, if the Gibeonites did not bless them: injuries done us on earth give us power in heaven: the oppressor is in no man's mercy, but his whom he hath trampled on.

Little did the Gibeonites think, that God had so taken to heart their wrongs, that for their sakes all Israel should suffer. Even when we think not of it, is the righteous Judge avenging our unrighteous vexations. Our hard measures cannot be hid from him; his returns are hid from us. It is sufficient for us, that God can be no more neglective, than ignorant, of our sufferings.

It is now in the power of these despised Hivites, to make their own terms with Israel: neither silver nor gold will savor with them, toward their satisfaction: nothing can expiate the blood of their fathers, but the blood of seven sons of their deceased persecutor: here was no other than a just retaliation: Saul had punished in them the offence of their predecessors; they will now revenge Saul's sin in his children: the measure we mete unto

others, is, with much equity, remeasured unto ourselves: every death would not content them of Saul's sons, but a cursed and ignominious; hanging on the tree: neither would that death content them, unless their own hands might be the executioners: neither would any place serve for the execution, but Gibeah, the court of Saul: neither would they do any of this, for the wreaking of their own fury, but for the appeasing of God's wrath; 'We will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul.'

David might not refuse the condition: he must deliver; they must execute. He chooses out seven of the sons and grand-children of Saul. That house had raised long an unjust persecution against David: now God pays it on another score.

David's love and oath to Jonathan preserves lame Mephibosheth: how much more shall the Father of all mercies do good unto the children of the faithful, for the covenant made with their parents!

The five sons of Adriel, the Meholathite, David's ancient rival in his first love, which were borne to him by Merab, Saul's daughter, and brought up by her barren sister Michal, the wife of David, are yielded up to death. Merab was, after a promise of marriage to David, unjustly given away by Saul to Adriel. Michal seems to abet the match, in breeding the children: now, in one act, not of David's seeking, the wrong is thus late avenged on Saul, Adriel, Merab, Michal, the children. It is a dangerous matter to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones. If their meekness have easily remitted it, their God will not pass it over without a severe retribution.

These five, together with two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, are hanged up at once before the Lord, yea and before the eyes of the world. No place but a hill will serve for this execution. The acts of justice, as they are intended for example, so they should be done in that eminent fashion, that may make them both most instructive and most terrifying. Unwarrantable courses of private revenge seek to hide their heads in secresy: the beautiful face of justice both affects the light and becomes it.

It was the general charge of God's law, that no corpse should remain all night on the gibbet. The Almighty hath power to dispense with his own command; so,

doubtless, he did in this extraordinary case. These carcasses did not defile but expiate.

Sorrowful Rizpah spreads her tent of sackcloth on the rock, for a sad attendance on those sons of her womb: death might bereave her of them, not them of her love. This spectacle was not more grievous to her, than pleasing to God, and happy to Israel. Now the clouds drop fatness, and the earth runs forth into plenty. The Gibeonites are satisfied, God reconciled, Israel relieved.

How blessed a thing is it for any nation, that justice is impartially executed, even on the mighty! A few drops of blood have procured large showers from heaven. A few carcasses are a rich compost to the earth. The drought and dearth remove away, with the breath of those pledges of the offender. Judgment cannot tyrannize, where justice reigns: as, contrarily, there can be no peace, where blood cries unheard, unregarded.—2 Sam. xxi.

THE NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE.

ISRAEL was grown wanton and mutinous. God pulls them down: first, by the sword; then, by famine; now, by pestilence.

Oh the wondrous, and yet just ways of the Almighty! Because Israel hath sinned, therefore David shall sin, that Israel may be punished; because God is angry with Israel, therefore David shall anger him more, and strike himself in Israel, and Israel through himself.

The Spirit of God elsewhere ascribes this motion to Satan, which here it attributes to God. Both had their hand in the work; God by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a just punishment for sin, Satan as in an act of sin; God in a wise ordination of it to good, Satan in a malicious intent of confusion. Thus at once, God moved, and Satan moved: neither is it any excuse to Satan or David, that God moved; neither is it any blemish to God, that Satan moved.

The ruler's sin is a punishment to a wicked people. Though they had many sins of their own, whereon God might have grounded a judgment, yet, as before he had punished them with dearth for Saul's sin, so now he will

not punish them with plague but for David's sin. If God were not angry with a people, he would not give up their governors to such evils, as whereby he is provoked to vengeance; and if their governors be thus given up, the people cannot be safe. The body drowns not, while the head is above the water; when that once sinks, death is near: justly therefore are we charged to make prayers and supplications, as for all, so especially for those that are in eminent authority. When we pray for ourselves, we pray not always for them; but we cannot pray for them, and not pray for ourselves: the public weal is not comprised in the private, but the private in the public.

What then was David's sin? He will needs have Israel and Judah numbered: surely there is no malignity in numbers; neither is it unfit for a prince to know his own strength: this is not the first time, that Israel had gone under a reckoning. The act offends not, but the misaffection; the same thing had been commendably done out of a princely providence, which now, through the curiosity, pride, mis-confidence of the doer, proves heinously vicious: those actions, which are in themselves indifferent, receive either their life or their bane from the intentions of the agent. Moses numbereth the people with thanks; David, with displeasure. Those sins, which carry the smoothest foreheads and have the most honest appearances, may more provoke the wrath of God, than those that bear the most abomination in their faces. How many thousand wickednesses passed through the hands of Israel, which we men would rather have branded out for judgment, than this of David's! The righteous Judge of the world censures sins, not by their ill looks, but by their foul hearts.

Who can but wonder to see Joab the saint, and David the trespasser? No prophet could speak better than that man of blood; 'The Lord thy God increase the people a hundred fold more than they be, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it; but why doth my lord the king desire this thing?' There is no man so lewd, as not to be sometimes in good moods, as not to dislike some evil; contrarily, no man on earth can be so holy as not

sometimes to overlash. It were pity, that either Joab or David should be tried by every act. How commonly have we seen those men ready to give good advice to others for the avoiding of some sins, who, in more gross outrages, have not had grace to counsel their own hearts! The same man, that had deserved death from David for his treacherous cruelty, dissuades David from an act that carried but a suspicion of evil. It is not so much to be regarded, who it is that admonisheth us, as what he brings: good counsel is never the worse, for the foul carriage. There are some dishes, that we may eat even from sluttish hands.

The purpose of sin, in a faithful man, is odious; much more the resolution. Notwithstanding Joab's discreet admonition, David will hold on his course; and will know the number of the people, only that he may know it.

Joab and the captains address themselves to the work. In things which are not in themselves evil, it is not for subjects to dispute, but to obey. That, which authority may sin in commanding, is done of the inferior, not with safety only, but with praise.

Nine months and twenty days, is this general master in hand: at last, the number is brought in. Israel is found eight hundred thousand strong; Judah, five hundred thousand. The ordinary companies, which served by course for the royal guard (four-and-twenty thousand each month) needed not to be reckoned. The addition of them, with their several captains, raises the sum of Israel to the rate of eleven hundred thousand: a power, able to puff up a carnal heart; but how can a heart, that is more than flesh, trust to an arm of flesh? O holy David, whither hath a glorious vanity transported thee? Thou, which once didst sing so sweetly, 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, for there is no help in him. His breath departeth, and he returneth to his earth; then his thoughts perish. Blessed is he, that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God;' how canst thou now stoop, to so unsafe and unworthy a confidence!

As some stomachful horse, that will not be stopt in his career with the sharpest bit, but runs on headily till he

come to some wall or ditch, and there stands still and trembles; so did David. All the dissuasions of Joab could not restrain him from his intended course. Almost ten months doth he run on impetuously, in a way of his own, rough and dangerous: at last, his heart smites him; the conscience of his offence, and the fear of judgment, hath fetched him on his knees; 'O Lord, I have sinned exceedingly in that I have done; therefore now, Lord, I beseech thee take away the trespass of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly.' It is possible for a sin, not to bait only, but to sojourn, in the holiest soul; but though it sojourn there as a stranger, it shall not dwell there as an owner. The renewed heart, after some rovings of error, will once, ere overlong, return home to itself; and fall out with that ill guide, wherewith it was misled, and with itself for being misled; and now it is resolved into tears, and breathes forth nothing but sighs, and confessions, and deprecations.

Here needed no Nathan, by a parabolical circumlocution to fetch in David to a sight and acknowledgment of his sin. The heart of the penitent supplied the prophet. No other tongue could smite him so deep, as his own thoughts. But though his reins chastised him in the night, yet his seer scourges him in the morning; 'Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things, choose thee which of them I shall do unto thee.' But what shall we say to this? When, on the prophet's reproof for an adultery cloaked with murder, David did but say, 'I have sinned,' it was presently returned, 'God hath put away thy sin;' neither did any smart follow, but the death of a misbegotten infant: and now, when he voluntarily reproveth himself for but a needless muster, and sought for pardon unbidden with great humiliation, God sends him the three terrible scourges, famine, sword, or pestilence, that he may choose with which of them he would rather to bleed. He shall have the favor of an election, not of a remission. God is more angered with a spiritual and immediate affront offered to his majesty, in our pride, and false confidence in earthly things, than with a fleshly crime, though heinously seconded.

It was a hard and woful choice of three years' famine

added to three forepast; or of three months' flight from the sword of an enemy; or three days' pestilence. The Almighty, that hath fore-determined his judgment, refers it to David's will, as fully, as if it were utterly undetermined. God had resolved; yet David may choose. That infinite wisdom hath foreseen the very will of his creature, which, while it freely inclines itself to what it would rather, unwittingly wills that which was fore-appointed in heaven.

We do well believe thee, O David, that thou wert in a wonderful strait. This very liberty is no other than fetters. Thou needst not have famine; thou needst not have the sword; thou needst not have pestilence: one of them thou must have: there is misery in all; there is misery in any. Thou and thy people can die but once; and once they must die, either by famine, war, or pestilence. O God, how vainly do we hope to pass over our sins with impunity, when all the favor that David and Israel can receive is, to choose their bane!

Yet, behold, neither sins, nor threats, nor fears, can bereave a true penitent of his faith; 'Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great.' There can be no evil of punishment, wherein God hath not a hand: there could be no famine, no sword, without him: but some evils are more immediate from a divine stroke; such was that plague, into which David is unwillingly willing to fall. He had his choice of days, months, years, in the same number; and, though the shortness of time prefixed to the threatened pestilence might seem to offer some advantage for the leading of his election, yet God meant, and David knew it, herein to proportion the difference of time to the violence of the plague; neither should any fewer perish, by so few days' pestilence, than by so many years' famine: the wealthiest might avoid the dearth; the swiftest might run away from the sword; no man could promise himself safety from that pestilence. In likelihood, God's angel would rather strike the most guilty; however, therefore, David might well look to be enwrapped in the common destruction, yet he rather chooseth to fall into that mercy which he had abused, and

to suffer from that justice which he had provoked; 'Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord.'

Humble confessions and devout penance cannot always avert temporal judgments. God's angel is abroad; and, within that short compass of time, sweeps away seventy thousand Israelites. David was proud of the number of his subjects: now they are abated, that he may see cause of humiliation in the matter of his glory: in what we have offended, we commonly smart.

These thousands of Israel were not so innocent, that they should only perish for David's sin: their sins were the motives, both of this sin and punishment: besides the respect of David's offence, they die for themselves.

It was no ordinary pestilence, that was thus suddenly and universally mortal. Common eyes saw the botch and the marks; saw not the angel: David's clearer sight hath espied him, after that killing peragration through the tribes of Israel, shaking his sword over Jerusalem, and hovering over Mount Sion; and now he, who doubtless had spent those three dismal days in the saddest contrition, humbly casts himself down at the feet of the avenger, and lays himself ready for the fatal stroke of justice.

It was more terror, that God intended, in the visible shape of his angel, and deeper humiliation; and what he meant, he wrought. Never soul could be more dejected, more anguished, with the sense of a judgment; in the bitterness whereof he cries out, 'Behold, I have sinned, yea, I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.' The better any man is, the more sensible he is of his own wretchedness. Many of those sheep were wolves to David. What had they done? They had done that, which was the occasion of David's sin, and the cause of their own punishment: but that gracious penitent knew his own sin; he knew not theirs: and therefore can say, 'I have sinned; What have they done?' It is safe accusing, where we may be boldest, and are best acquainted, ourselves.

Oh the admirable charity of David, that would have engrossed the plague to himself and his house, from the

rest of Israel; and sues to interpose himself, betwixt his people and the vengeance! He, that had put himself on the paws of the bear and lion for the rescue of his sheep, will now cast himself on the sword of the angel, for the preservation of Israel: there was hope in those conflicts; in this yieldance, there could be nothing but death. Thus didst thou, O Son of David, the true and great shepherd of thy church, offer thyself to death for them who had their hands in thy blood, who both procured thy death and deserved their own. Here, he offered himself that had sinned, for those whom he professed to have not done evil; thou, that didst no sin, vouchsafedst to offer thyself for us that were all sin: he offered and escaped, thou offeredst and diedst; and by thy death we live, and are freed from everlasting destruction.

But, O Father of all mercies, how little pleasure dost thou take in the blood of sinners! It was thine own pity, that inhibited the destroyer. Ere David could see the angel, thou hadst restrained him; 'It is sufficient, hold now thy hand.' If thy compassion did not both withhold and abridge thy judgments, what place were there for us out of hell?

How easy and just had it been for God, to have made the shutting up of that third evening red with blood! His goodness repents of the slaughter; and calls for that sacrifice, wherewith he will be appeased.

An altar must be built in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Lo, in that very hill, where the angel held the sword of Abraham from killing his son, doth God now hold the sword of the angel from killing his people. On this very ground, shall the temple after stand. Here shall be the holy altar, which shall send up the acceptable oblations of God's people, in succeeding generations.

O God, what was the thrashing-floor of a Jebusite to thee, above all other soils? What virtue, what merit, was in this earth? As in places, so in persons, it is not to be heeded, what they are, but what thou wilt. That is worthiest, which thou pleasest to accept.

Rich and bountiful Araunah is ready to meet David, in so holy a motion; and munificently offers his Sion for the place, his oxen for the sacrifice, his carts and plough

and other utensils of his husbandry for the wood: two frank hearts are well met: David would buy; Araunah would give. The Jebusite would not sell; David will not take. Since it was for God, and to David, Araunah is loath to bargain: since it was for God, David wisheth to pay dear; 'I will not offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God, of that which doth cost me nothing.' Heroical spirits do well become eminent persons. He, that knew it was better to give than to receive, would not receive but give. There can be no devotion in a niggardly heart: as unto dainty palates, so to the godly soul, that tastes sweetest, that costs most: nothing is dear enough for the Creator of all things. It is a heartless piety of those base-minded Christians, that care only to serve God good cheap.—2 Sam. xxiv. 1 Chron. xxi.

BOOK XVII.

ADONIJAH DEFEATED.

David had not so carefully husbanded his years, as to maintain a vigorous age; he was therefore, what through wars, what with sorrows, what with sickness, decrepit betimes: by that time he was seventy years old, his natural heat was so wasted, that his clothes could not warm him. How many have we known, of more strength at more age! The holiest soul dwells not in an impregnable fort. If the revenging angel spared David, yet age and death will not spare him. Neither his new altar, nor his costly sacrifice, can be of force against decay of nature. Nothing but death can prevent the weaknesses of age.

None can blame a people, if, when they have a good king, they are desirous to hold him. David's servants and subjects have commended unto his bed a fair young virgin; not for the heat of lust, but of life; that by this means they might make an outward supply of fuel, for that vital fire, which was well-near extinguished with age.

As it is in the market or the stage, so it is in our life; one goes in, another comes out. When David was withering, Adonijah was in his blossom.

That son, as he was next to Absalom both in the beauty of his body and the time of his birth, so was he too like him in practice. He also, taking advantage of his father's infirmity, will be carving himself of the kingdom of Israel. That he might no whit vary from his pattern, he gets him also chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

These two, Absalom and Adonijah, were the darlings of their father. Their father had not displeased them from their childhood; therefore they both displeased him in his age. Those children had need to be very gracious, that are not marred with pampering. It is more than God owes us, if we receive comfort in those children, whom we have over-loved. The indulgence of parents at last pays them home in crosses.

It is true, that Adonijah was David's eldest son now remaining, and therefore might seem to challenge the justest title to the crown; but the kingdom of Israel, in so late an erection, had not yet known the right of succession. God himself, that had ordained the government, was as yet the immediate elector: he fetched Saul from among the stuff, and David from the sheepfold; and had now appointed Solomon, from the ferule to the sceptre. And if Adonijah (which is unlike) had not known this, yet it had been his part, to have taken his father with him, in this claim of his succession; and not so to prevent a brother, that he should shoulder out a father; and not so violently to pre-occupy the throne, that he should rather be a rebel than an heir.

As Absalom, so Adonijah, wants not furtherers, in this usurpation, whether spiritual or temporal: Joab the general and Abiathar the priest give both counsel and aid, to so unseasonable a challenge. These two had been firm to David, in all his troubles, in all insurrections; yet now, finding him fastened to the bed of age and death, they show themselves thus slippery in the loose. Outward happiness and friendship are not known till our last act: in the impotency of either our revenge or recompense, it will easily appear, who loved us for ourselves, who for their own ends.

Had not Adonijah known, that Solomon was designed

to the kingdom, both by God and David, he had never invited all the rest of the king's sons, his brethren, and left out Solomon; who was otherwise the most unlikely, to have been his rival in his honor: all the rest were elder than he; and might therefore have had more pretence for their competition. Doubtless, the court of Israel could not but know, that, immediately on the birth of Solomon, God sent him, by Nathan the prophet, a name and message of love; neither was it for nothing, that God called him Jedidiah; and fore-promised him the honor of building a house to his name; and, in return of so glorious a service, the establishment of the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever: notwithstanding all which, Adonijah, backed by the strength of a Joab, and the gravity of an Abiathar, will underwork Solomon, and justle into the not-yet-vacant seat of his father David. Vain men, while, like proud and yet brittle clay, they will be knocking their sides against the solid and eternal decree of God, break themselves in pieces.

I do not find that Adonijah sent any message of threats or unkindness to Zadok the priest, or Nathan the prophet, or Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the other worthies: only he invited them not to his feast, with the king's sons and servants. Sometimes a very omission is an affront and a menace. They well knew, that, since they were not called as guests, they were counted as enemies. Ceremonies of courtesy, though they be in themselves slight and arbitrary, yet the neglect of them, in some cases, may undergo a dangerous construction.

Nathan was the man, by whom God had sent that errand of grace to David, concerning Solomon, assuring him both to reign and prosper; yet now, when Adonijah's plot was thus on foot, he doth not sit still and depend on the issue of God's decree, but he bestirs him in the business, and consults with Bathsheba, how at once to save their lives, and to advance Solomon, and defeat Adonijah. God's pre-determination includes the means as well as the end. The same providence, that had ordained a crown to Solomon, a repulse to Adonijah, preservation to Bathsheba and Nathan, had fore-appointed the wise and industrious endeavors of the prophet, to bring about

his just and holy purposes: if we would not have God wanting to us, we must not be wanting to ourselves: even when we know what God hath meant to us, we may not be negligent.

The prophets of God did not look for revelation, in all their affairs: in some things, they were left to the counsel of their own hearts. The policy of Nathan was of use, as well as his prophecy: that alone hath turned the stream into the right channel. Nothing could be more wisely contrived, than the sending in of Bathsheba to David, with so seasonable and forcible an expostulation; and the seconding of hers, with his own.

Though lust were dead in David, yet the respects of his old matrimonial love lived still: the very presence of Bathsheba pleaded strongly; but her speech more. The time was, when his affection ostended in excess towards her, being then another's; he cannot now neglect her, being his own: and if either his age or the remorse of his old offence should have set him off, yet she knew his oath was sure; 'My lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly, Solomon, thy son, shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne. His word had been firm, but his oath was inviolable: we are engaged, if we have promised; but if we have sworn, we are bound. Neither heaven nor earth have any gyves for that man, that can shake off the fetters of an oath; for he cares not for that God whom he dares invoke to a falsehood; and he that cares not for God will not care for man.

Ere Bathsheba can be over the threshold, Nathan (on compact) is knocking at the door. God's prophet was never but welcome to the bed-chamber of King David. In a seeming strangeness, he falls on the same suit, on the same complaint, with Bathsheba. Honest policies do not misbecome the holiest prophets. She might seem to speak as a woman, as a mother, out of passion; the word of a prophet could not be misdoubted: he therefore, that had formerly brought to David that chiding and bloody message concerning Bathsheba, comes now to David to sue for the life and honor of Bathsheba; and he, that was sent from God to David, to bring the news of a gracious promise of favor unto Solomon, comes now to challenge

the execution of it from the hands of a father; and he, whose place freed him from suspicion of a faction, complains of the insolent demeanor and proclamation of Adonijah; what he began with an humble obeisance, shutting up in a lowly and loving expostulation; 'Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not showed thy servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?' As Nathan was of God's counsel, unto David; so was he of David's counsel, both to God and the state: as God therefore, on all occasions, told Nathan what he meant to do with David; so had David wont, to tell Nathan what he meant to do, in his holy and most important civil affairs. There are cases, wherein it is not unfit for God's prophets to meddle with matters of state. It is no disparagement to religious princes, to impart their counsels unto them, who can requite them with the counsels of God.

That wood, which a single iron could not rive, is soon splitted with a double wedge. The seasonable importunity of Bathsheba and Nathan, thus seconding each other, hath so wrought on David, that now his love to Adonijah gives place to indignation; nature, to a holy fidelity: and now he renews his ancient oath to Bathsheba, with a passionate solemnity; 'As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, even as I sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly, Solomon, thy son, shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my stead, so will I certainly do this day.'

In the decay of David's body, I find not his intellective powers any whit impaired: as one therefore, that, from his bed, could with a perfect (if weak) hand, steer the government of Israel, he gives wise and full directions, for the inauguration of Solomon: Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the captain, receive his grave and princely charge, for the carriage of that so weighty a business. They are commanded to take with them the royal guard, to set Solomon on his father's mule, to carry him down in state to Gihon, to anoint him with the holy oil of the tabernacle, to sound the trumpets and proclaim him in the streets, to bring him back with triumph and magnificence to the court, and to set him in the royal throne with all the due ceremonies of coronation.

How pleasing was this command to them, who, in Solomon's glory, saw their own safety! Benaiah applauds it; and, not fearing a father's envy, in David's presence wisheth Solomon's throne exalted above his. The people are ravished, with the joy of so hopeful a succession; and break the earth, and fill the heaven, with the noise of their music and shouting.

Solomon's guests had now, at last, better cheer than Adonijah's; whose feast (as all wicked men's) ended in horror. No sooner are their bellies full of meat, than their ears are full of the sound of those trumpets, which at once proclaim Solomon's triumph and their confusion. Even after the meal is ended, comes the reckoning. God could as easily have prevented this jollity, as marred it; but he willingly suffers vain men to please themselves for a time, in the conceited success of their own projects, that afterwards their disappointment may be so much the more grievous. No doubt, at this feast there was many a health drunken to Adonijah, many a confident boast of their prosperous design, many a scorn of the despised faction of Solomon; and now, for their last dish, is served up astonishment, and fearful expectation of a just revenge. Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, brings the news of Solomon's solemn and joyful enthronization: now all hearts are cold, all faces pale; and every man hath but life enough to run away. How suddenly is this braving troop dispersed! Adonijah, their new prince, flies to the horns of the altar; as distrusting all hopes of life, save the sanctity of the place, and the mercy of his rival.

So doth the wise and just God befool proud and insolent sinners, in those secret plots, wherein they hope to undermine the true Son of David, the Prince of Peace. He suffers them to lay their heads together, and to feast themselves in a jocund security and promise of success; at last, when they are at the height of their joys and hopes, he confounds all their devices, and lays them open to the scorn of the world, and to the anguish of their own guilty hearts.—1 Kings i.

DAVID'S END, AND SOLOMON'S BEGINNING.

It well became Solomon, to begin his reign in peace. Adonijah receives pardon, on his good behavior; and finds the throne of Solomon as safe as the altar.

David lives to see a wise son warm in his seat; and now, he, that had yielded to succession, yields to nature.

Many good counsels had David given his heir; now he sums them up in his end. Dying words are wont to be weightiest: the soul, when it is entering into glory, breathes nothing but divine.

'I go the way of all the earth.' How well is that princely heart content, to subscribe to the conditions of human mortality; as one that knew sovereignty doth not reach to the affairs of nature! Though a king, he neither expects nor desires an immunity from dissolution; making no account to go in any other than the common track, to the universal home of mankind, the house of age. Whither should earth, but to earth? And why should we grudge to do that, which all do?

'Be thou strong, therefore; and show thyself a man.' Even when his spirit was going out, he puts spirit into his son: age puts life into youth, and the dying animates the vigorous. He had well found, that strength was requisite to government; that he had need to be no less than a man, that should rule over men. If greatness should never receive any opposition, yet those worlds of cares and businesses, that attend the chair of state, are able to overlay any mean powers. A weak man may obey; none but the strong can govern.

Graceless courage were but the whetstone of tyranny; 'Take heed, therefore, to the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes.' The best legacy that David bequeaths to his heir, is, the care of piety. Himself had found the sweetness of a good conscience, and now he commends it to his successor. If there be any thing, that, in our desires of the prosperous condition of our children, takes place of goodness, our hearts are not upright. Here was the father of a king, charging the king his son, to keep the statutes of the King of Kings; as one, that knew greatness could neither

exempt from obedience, nor privilege sin; as one, that knew the least deviation in the greatest and highest orb, is both most sensible and most dangerous. Neither would he have his son, to look for any prosperity, save only from well-doing: that happiness is built on sand or ice, which is raised on any foundation besides virtue. If Solomon were wise, David was good; and if old Solomon had well remembered the counsel of old David, he had not so foully miscarried.

After the precepts of piety, follow those of justice; distributing in a due recompense, as revenge to Joab and Shimei, so favor to the house of Barzillai.

The bloodiness of Joab had lain long on David's heart. The hideous noise of those treacherous murders, as it had pierced heaven, so it still filled the ears of David. He could abhor the villany, though he could not revenge it. What he cannot pay, he will owe; and approve himself at last a faithful debtor: now he will defray it by the hand of Solomon. The slaughter was of Abner and Amasa: David appropriates it; 'Thou knowest what Joab did to me.' The sovereign is smitten in the subject: neither is it other than just, that the arraingment of mean malefactors runs in the style, of wrong to the king's crown and dignity. How much more dost thou, O Son of David, take to thyself those insolencies, which are done to thy poorest subjects, servants, sons, members here on earth! No Saul can touch a Christian here below, but thou feelest it in heaven, and complainest.

But what shall we think of this? David was a man of war, Solomon a king of peace; yet David refers this revenge to Solomon. How just it was, that he, who shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war on his girdle that was about his loins, should have his blood shed in peace, by a prince of peace! Peace is fittest to rectify the outrages of war. Or, whether is not this done, in type of that divine administration, wherein thou, O Father of heaven, hast committed all judgment unto thine eternal Son? Thou, who couldst immediately either plague or absolve sinners, wilt do neither but by the hand of a Mediator.

Solomon learned betimes, what his ripeness taught

afterwards; 'Take away the wicked from the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.' Cruel Joab, and malicious Shimei, must be therefore, on the first opportunity, removed. The one lay open to present justice, for abetting the conspiracy of Adonijah, neither needs the help of time for a new advantage; the other went under the protection of an oath from David, and therefore must be fetched in on a new challenge. The hoary head of both must be brought to the grave with blood, else David's head could not be brought to his grave in peace. Due punishment of malefactors is the debt of authority. If that holy king have run into arrearages, yet, as one that hates and fears to break the bank, he gives orders to his paymaster: it shall be defrayed; if not by him, yet for him.

Generous natures cannot be unthankful: Barzillai had showed David some kindness in his extremity; and now the good man will have posterity to inherit the thanks. How much more bountiful is the Father of mercies, in the remuneration of our poor unworthy services! Even successions of generations shall fare the better, for one good parent.

The dying words and thoughts of the man after God's own heart, did not confine themselves to the straits of these particular charges, but enlarged themselves to the care of God's public service. As good men are best at last, David did never so busily and carefully marshal the affairs of God, as when he was fixed to the bed of his age and death. Then did he load his son Solomon, with the charge of building the house of God. Then did he lay before the eyes of his son the model and pattern of that whole sacred work, whereof, if Solomon bare the name, yet David no less merits it. He now gives the platform of the courts and buildings. He gives the gold and silver for that holy use; a hundred thousand talents of gold, a thousand talents of silver; besides brass and iron passing weight. He weighs out those precious metals for their several designments. Every future vessel is laid out already in his poise, if not in his form. He excites the princes of Israel to their assistance, in so high a work: he takes notice of their bountiful offerings. He numbers up

the Levites for the public services, and sets them their tasks. He appoints the singers and other musicians to their stations; the porters to the gates, that should be. And now, when he hath set all things in a desired order and forwardness, he shuts up with a zealous blessing of his Solomon and his people, and sleeps with his fathers. O blessed soul, how quiet a possession hast thou now taken, after so many tumults, of a better crown! Thou, that hast prepared all things for the house of thy God, how happily art thou now welcomed to that house of his, 'not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!' Who now shall envy unto good princes, the honor of overseeing the businesses of God and his church; when David was thus punctual in these divine provisions? What fear can be of usurpation, where they have so glorious a precedent?

Now is Solomon the second time crowned king of Israel; and now, in his own right, as formerly in his father's, sits peaceably on the throne of the Lord. His awe and power come on faster than his years.

Envy and ambition, where it is once kindled, may sooner be hid in the ashes, than quite put out. Adonijah yet hangs after his old hopes: he remembers how sweet he found the name of a king; and now hath laid a new plot, for the setting up of his cracked title. He would make the bed a step to the throne: his old complies are sure enough: his part would gather much strength, if he might enjoy Abishag, the relict of his father, to wife. If it were not the Jewish fashion, as is pretended, that a king's widow should marry none but a king; yet certainly the power, both of the alliance and friendship of a queen, must needs not a little advance his purpose. The crafty rival dare not, either move the suit to Solomon, or effect the marriage without him; but would cunningly undermine the son, by the suit of that mother, whose suit had undermined him. The weaker vessels are commonly used, in the most dangerous suggestions of evil.

Bathsheba was so wise a woman, that some of her counsels are canonized for divine; yet she saw not the depth of this drift of Adonijah; therefore she both entertains the suit, and moves it. But, whatever were the intent of the suitor, could she choose but see the unlawfulness

of so incestuous a match? It is not long, since she saw her late husband David abominating the bed of those his concubines, that had been touched by his son Absalom; and can she hold it lawful, that his son Adonijah should climb up to the bed of his father's wife? Sometimes, even the best eyes are dim, and discern not those things which are obvious to weaker sights. Or, whether did not Bathsheba well see the foulness of the suit, and yet in compassion of Adonijah's late repulse, wherein she was the chief agent, and in a desire to make him amends for the loss of the kingdom, she yields even thus to gratify him? It is an injurious weakness, to be drawn on by any by-respects, to the furtherance of faulty suits, of unlawful actions.

No sooner doth Bathsheba come in place, than Solomon her son rises from his chair of state, and meets her, and bows to her, and sets her on his right hand; as not so remembering himself to be a king, that he should forget he was a son. No outward dignity can take away the rights and obligations of nature. Had Bathsheba been as mean as Solomon was mighty, she had carried away this honor from a gracious son.

Yet for all these due compliments, Bathsheba goes away with a denial. Reverence she shall have, she shall not have a compliance. In the acts of magistracy, all regards of natural relations must give way. That, which she propounded as a small request, is now, after a general and confused engagement, rejected as unreasonable. It were pity we should be heard in all our suits. Bathsheba makes a petition against herself, and knows it not: her safety and life depend on Solomon's reign; yet she unwittingly moves for the advancement of Adonijah. Solomon was too dutiful to check his mother, and too wise to yield to her: in unfit supplications, we are most heard when we are most repelled. Thus doth our God many times answer our prayers, with merciful denials; and most blesseth us, in crossing our desires.

Wise Solomon doth not find himself perplexed with the scruple of his promise. He, that had said, 'Ask on, for I will not say thee nay,' can now say, 'God do so to me and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word

against his own life.' His promise was according to his supposition; his supposition was of no other than of a suit, honest, reasonable, expedient; now, he holds himself free from that grant, wherein there was at once both sin and danger. No man can be entangled with general words, against his own just and honest intentions.

The policies of wicked men befool them at last: this intercession hath undone Adonijah; and, instead of the throne, hastens his grave. The sword of Benaiah puts an end to that dangerous rivalry.

Joab and Abiathar still held champerty with Adonijah. Their hand was both in the claim of his kingdom, and in the suit of Abishag. There are crimes, wherein there are no accessories; such is this of treason.

Abiathar may thank his burden, that he lives: had he not borne the ark of the Lord before David, he had not now carried his head on his shoulders: had he not been afflicted with David, he had perished with Adonijah: now, though he were, in his own merit, a man of death, yet he shall survive his partners; 'Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields.' The priesthood of Abiathar, as it aggravated his crime, so it shall preserve his life. Such honor have good princes given to the ministers of the sanctuary, that their very coat hath been defence enough against the sword of justice: how much more should it be of proof, against the contempt of base persons!

Besides his function, respect is had to his sufferings. The father and brethren of Abiathar were slain for David's sake; therefore, for David's sake, Abiathar, though worthy of death, shall live. He had been now a dead man, if he had not been formerly afflicted. Thus doth our good God deal with us: by the rod, he prevents the sword; and therefore will not condemn us for our sins, because we have suffered.

If Abiathar do not forfeit his life, yet his office he shall: he must change Jerusalem for Anathoth, and the priesthood for a retired privacy.

It was fourscore years ago, since the sentence of judgment was denounced against the house of Eli: now doth it come to execution. This just quarrel against Abiathar, the last of that line, shall make good the threatened

judgment. The wickedness of Eli's house was neither purged by sacrifice, nor obliterated by time. If God pay slowly, yet he pays sure. Delay of most certain punishment is neither any hindrance to his justice, nor any comfort to our miseries.—1 Kings ii. 1 Chron. xxix.

THE EXECUTION OF JOAB AND SHIMEI.

ABIATHAR shall live, though he serve not. It is in the power of princes to remit, at least, those punishments, which attend the breach of human laws: good reason they should have power, to dispense with the wrongs done to their own persons.

The news of Adonijah's death and Abiathar's removal, cannot but affright Joab; who now runs to Gibeon, and takes sanctuary in the tabernacle of God. All his hope of defence is in the horns of the altar. Fond Joab, hadst thou formerly sought for counsel from the tabernacle, thou hadst not now needed to seek to it for refuge: if thy devotions had not been wanting to that altar, thou hadst not needed it for a shelter. It is the fashion of our foolish presumption, to look for protection, where we have not cared to yield obedience.

Even a Joab clings fast to God's altar, in his extremity; which, in his ruff and welfare he regarded not. The worst men would be glad to make use of God's ordinances, for their advantage: necessity will drive the most profane and lawless man to God. But what do these bloody hands touching the holy altar of God? Miserable Joab, what help canst thou expect from that sacred pile? Those horns, that were sprinkled with the blood of beasts, abhor to be touched by the blood of men: that altar was for the expiation of sin, by blood; not for the protection of the sin of blood. If Adonijah fled thither and escaped, it is murder that pursues thee, more than conspiracy: God hath no sanctuary for a wilful homicide.

Yea, such respect doth Benaiah give to that holy place, that his sword is unwilling to touch him that touches the altar. Those horns shall put off death for the time; and give protraction of the execution, though not preservation of life.

How sweet is life, even to those who have been pro-

digal of the blood of others, that Joab shifts thus to hold it, but some few hours!

Benaiah returns with Joab's answer, instead of his head; 'Nay, but I will die here;' as not daring to unsheath his sword against a man sheltered in God's tabernacle, without a new commission. Young Solomon is so well acquainted with the law of God in such a case, that he sticks not at the sentence. He knew that God had enacted, 'If a man came presumptuously on his neighbor, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.' He knew Joab's murders had not been more presumptuous, than guileful; and therefore he sends Benaiah to take away the offender, both from God and men, from the altar and the world.

No subject had merited more than Joab. When proclamation was made in Israel, that whoever should smite the Jebusites first, he should be the chief and captain, Joab was the man: when David built some part of Jerusalem, Joab built the rest; so as Jerusalem owes itself to Joab, both for recovery and reparation: no man held so close to David: no man was more intent to the weal of Israel; none so successful in victories: yet now he is called to reckon for his old sins, and must repay blood to Amasa and Abner. It is not in the power of all our deserts, to buy off one sin, either with God or man. Where life is so deeply forfeited, it admits of no redemption.

The honest simplicity of those times, knew not of any infamy in the execution of justice. Benaiah, who was the great marshal under Solomon, thinks not his fingers defiled with that fatal stroke. It is a foolish niceness; to put more shame in the doing of justice, than in the violating of it.

In one act, Solomon hath approved himself, both a good magistrate and a good son; fulfilling at once, the will of the father and the charge of God; concluding, on this just execution, that 'Upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, there shall be peace for ever from the Lord;' and inferring, that, without this, there could have been no peace.

Blood is a restless suitor; and will not leave clamoring

for judgment, till the mouth be stopped with revenge. In this case, favor to the offender is cruelty to the favorer.

Now hath Joab paid all his arrearages, by the sword of Benaiah. There is no suit against his corpse; that hath the honor of a burial, fit for a peer of Israel, for the near cousin to the king. Death puts an end to all quarrels. Solomon strikes off the score, when God is satisfied. The revenge, that survives death, and will not be shut up in the coffin, is barbarous, and unbeseeming true Israelites.

Only Shimei remains on the file. His course is next; yet so, as that it shall be in his own liberty to hasten his end. On David's remission, Shimei dwells securely in Bahurim, a town of the tribe of Benjamin. Doubtless, when he saw so round justice done on Adonijah and Joab, his guilty heart could not think Solomon's message portended aught but his execution; and now he cannot but be well pleased with so easy conditions, of dwelling at Jerusalem, and not passing over the brook Kidron. What more delightful place could he choose to live in, than that city, which was the glory of the whole earth? what more pleasing bounds could he wish, than the sweet banks of Kidron? Jerusalem could be no prison to him, while it was a paradise to his betters; and if he had a desire to take fresh air, he had the space of six furlongs to walk from the city to the brook. He could not complain to be so delectably confined. And besides, thrice every year he might be sore to see all his friends, without stirring his foot.

Wise Solomon, while he cared to seem not too severe an exactor of that which his father had remitted, prudently lays insensible twigs for so foul an offender. Besides the old grudge, no doubt Solomon saw cause to suspect the fidelity of Shimei; as a man who was ever known to be hollow to the house of David. The obscurity of a country life would easily afford him more safe opportunities of secret mischief. Many eyes shall watch him in the city. He cannot look out unseen; he cannot whisper unheard. On no other terms shall he enjoy his life, which the least straying shall forfeit.

Shimei feels no pain in this restraint. How many no-

bles of Israel do that for pleasure, which he doth on command! Three years hath he lived within compass, limited both by Solomon's charge and his own oath. It was still in his power, notwithstanding David's caveat, to have laid down his hoary head in the grave, without blood. The just God infatuates those, whom he means to plague. Two of Shimei's servants are fled to Gath: and now he saddles his ass, and is gone to fetch them back. 'Either,' he thinks, 'this word of Solomon is forgotten, or, in the multitude of greater affairs, not heeded; or this so small an occurrence will not come to his ear.' Covetousness, and presumption of impunity, are the destruction of many a soul. Shimei seeks his servants, and loses himself. How many are there, who cry out of this folly, and yet imitate it! These earthly things either are our servants, or should be: how commonly do we see men run out of the bounds set by God's law, to hunt after them, till their souls incur a fearful judgment?

Princes have thousands of eyes and ears. If Shimei will for more secresy saddle his own ass, and take, as is like, the benefit of night for his passage, his journey cannot be hid from Soloman. How wary had those men need to be, that are obnoxious! Without delay is Shimei complained of, convented, charged with violation both of the oath of God and the injunction of Solomon: and, that all these might appear to be but an occasion of that punishment, whose cause was more remote, now is all that old venom laid before him, which his malice had long since spit at God's anointed; 'Thou knowest all the wickedness, whereto thine heart is privy, that thou didst to David my father.'

Had this old tally been stricken off, yet could not Shimei have pleaded aught for his life: for, had he said, 'Let not my lord the king be thus mortally displeased, for so small an offence: whoever died for passing over Kidron? What man is the worse for my harmless journey?' it had soon been returned, 'If the act be small, yet the circumstances are deadly: the commands of sovereign authority make the slightest duties weighty: if the journey be harmless, yet not the disobedience.' It is not for subjects, to poise the prince's charge in the scales of their

weak constructions; but they must suppose it ever to be of such importance, as is pretended by the commander.

Besides the precept, here was a mutual adjuration. Shimei swore not to go; Solomon swore his death, if he went: the one oath must be revenged; the other must be kept; if Shimei were false in offending, Solomon will be just in punishing. Now therefore, that, which Abishai the son of Zeruiah wished to have done in the greenness of the wound and was repelled, after long festering Benaiah is commanded to do. The stones that Shimei threw at David struck not so deep, as Benaiah's sword: the tongue that cursed the Lord's anointed hath paid the head to boot. Vengeance against rebels may sleep; it cannot die: a sure, if late, judgment attends those, that dare lift up either the hand or tongue against the sacred persons of God's vicegerents. How much less will the God of heaven suffer, unrevenged, the insolencies and blasphemies against his own divine majesty! It is a fearful word, he should not be just, if he should hold these guiltless.—1 Kings ii.

SOLOMON'S CHOICE, WITH HIS JUDGMENT ON THE TWO HARLOTS.

After so many messages and proofs of grace, Solomon begins doubtfully, both for his match and for his devotion. If Pharaoh's daughter were not a proselyte, his early choice was (besides unwarrantable) dangerous. The high places not only stood, but were frequented, both by the people and king. I do not find David climbing up those mishallowed hills, in an affection of the variety of altars: Solomon doth so, and yet loves the Lord, and is loved of God again. Such is the mercy of our God, that he will not suffer our well-meant weaknesses to bereave us of his favors: he rather pities, than plagues us, for the infirmities of upright hearts.

Gibeon was well worthy to be the chief, yea the only high place. There was the allowed altar of God: there was the tabernacle, though, as then, severed from the ark: thither did young Solomon go up; and, as desiring to begin his reign with God, there he offers no less than a thousand sacrifices.

Solomon worships God by day: God appears to Solomon by night. Well may we look to enjoy God, when we have served him. The night cannot but be happy, whose day hath been holy.

It was no unusual course with God, to reveal himself unto his servants by dreams: so did he here to Solomon; who saw more with his eyes shut, than ever they could see open, even him that was invisible.

The good king had offered unto God a thousand burnt sacrifices, and now God offered him his option; 'Ask what I shall give thee.' He, whose the beasts are on a thousand mountains, graciously accepts a small return of his own. It stands not with the munificence of a bountiful God, to be indebted to his creature. We cannot give him aught unrecompensed. There is no way wherein we can be so liberal to ourselves, as by giving to the possessor of all things. And art thou still, O God, less free unto us, thy meaner servants, under the Gospel? Hast thou not said, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, it shall be given you?' Only give us grace, not to be wanting unto thee, and we know thou canst not suffer any thing to be wanting unto us.

The night follows the temper of the day; and the heart so useth to sleep, as it wakes. Had not the thoughts of Solomon been intent on wisdom by day, he had not made it his suit in his dream. There needs no leisure of deliberation: the heart was so forestalled with the love and admiration of wisdom, that, not abiding the least motion of a competition, it fastens on that grace it had longed for; 'Give unto thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people.'

Had not Solomon been wise before, he had not known the worth of wisdom; he had not preferred it in his desires. The dunghill cocks of the world cannot know the price of this pearl. Those, that have it, know that all other excellencies are but trash and rubbish unto it.

Solomon was a great king, and saw that he had power enough; but withal, he found that royalty, without wisdom, was no other than eminent dishonor. There is no trade of life, whereto there belongs not a peculiar wisdom; without which, there is nothing but a tedious unprofitable-

ness: much more to the highest and busiest vocation, the regiment of men.

As God hath no reason, to give his best favors unasked, so hath he no will to withhold them, where they are asked.

He, that in his cradle had the title of 'beloved of God,' is now beloved more in the throne, for the love and desire of wisdom.

This soil could never have borne this fruit alone. Solomon could not so much as have dreamed of wisdom, if God had not put it into him; and now God takes the suit so well, as if he were beholden to his creature, for wishing the best to itself; and because Solomon hath asked what he should, he shall now receive, both what he asked and what he asked not: riches and honor shall be given him into the match. So doth God love a good choice, that he recompenses it with overgiving. Could we but first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these earthly things should be superadded to us. Had Solomon made wealth his boon, he had failed both of riches and wisdom; now he asks the best, and speeds of all. They are in a fair way of happiness, that can pray well.

It was no discomfort to Solomon, that he awaked and found it a dream; for he knew this dream was divine and oracular; and he already found in his first waking, the real performance of what was promised him sleeping: such illumination did he sensibly find in all the rooms of his heart, as if God had now given him a new soul.

No marvel if Solomon, now returning from the tabernacle to the ark, testified his joy and thankfulness, by burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, and public feastings. The heart, that hath found in itself the lively testimonies of God's presence and favor, cannot contain itself from outward expressions.

God likes not to have his gifts lie dead, where he hath conferred them. Israel shall soon witness they have a king enlightened from heaven; in whom wisdom did not stay for heirs, did not admit of any parallel in his predecessors. The all-wise God will find occasions to draw forth those graces to use and light, which he hath bestowed on man.

Two harlots come before young Solomon, with a difficult plea. It is not like, the prince's ear was the first that heard this complaint: there was a subordinate course of justice, for the determination of these meaner incidences. The hardness of this decision brought the matter, through all the benches of inferior judicature, to the tribunal of Solomon.

The very Israelitish harlots were not so unnatural, as some now-a-days, that counterfeit honesty. These strive for the fruit of their womb; ours, to put them off.

One son is yet alive; two mothers contend for him. The children were alike for feature, for age; the mothers were alike for reputation. Here can be no evidence from others' eyes. Whether's now is the living child; and whether's is dead? Had Solomon gone about to wring forth the truth by tortures, he had perhaps plagued the innocent, and added pain to the misery of her loss: the weaker had been guilty; and the more able to bear, had carried away both the child and the victory. The countenance of either of the mothers bewrayed an equality of passion: sorrow possessed the one, for the son she had lost; and the other, for the son she was in danger to lose. Both were equally peremptory and importunate in their claim. It is in vain to think, that the true part can be discerned, by the vehemence of their challenge: falsehood is ofttimes more clamorous than truth. No witnesses can be produced. They two dwelt apart under one roof; and if some neighbors have seen the children at their birth and circumcision, yet how little difference, how much change, is there, in the favor of infants! How doth death alter more confirmed lines!

The impossibility of proof makes the guilty more confident, more impudent. The true mother pleads, that her child was taken away at midnight, by the other; but in her sleep: she saw it not; she felt it not; and, if all her senses could have witnessed it, yet here was but the affirmation of the one, against the denial of the other, which in persons alike credible do but counterpoise.

What is there now to lead the judge, since there is nothing either in the act, or circumstances, or persons, or plea, or evidence, that might sway the sentence? Solomon

well saw, that, when all outward proofs failed, there was an inward affection, which, if it could be fetched out, would certainly bewray the true mother. He knew, sorrow might more easily be dissembled, than natural love: both sorrowed for their own; both could not love one, as theirs: to draw forth then this true proof of motherhood, Solomon calls for a sword.

Doubtless, some of the wiser hearers smiled on each other; and thought in themselves, 'What! will the young king cut these knotty causes in pieces? Will he divide justice with edge tools? Will he smite at hazard, before conviction?' The actions of wise princes are riddles to vulgar constructions; neither is it for the shallow capacities of the multitude, to fathom the deep projects of sovereign authority. That sword, which had served for execution, shall now serve for trial; 'Divide ye the living child in twain, and give the one half to the one, and the other half to the other.' O divine oracle of justice, commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that could not be discovered! Neither God nor his deputies may be so taken at their words, as if they always intended their commands for action, and not sometimes for probation.

This sword hath already pierced the breast of the true mother; and divided her heart with fear and grief, at so killing a sentence. There needs no other rack, to discover nature; and now she thinks, 'Wo is me, that came for justice, and am answered with cruelty; 'Divide ye the living child!' Alas! what hath that poor infant offended? that it survives, and is sued for? How much less miserable had I been, that my child had been smothered in my sleep, than mangled before mine eyes! If a dead carcass could have satisfied me, I needed not to have complained. What a woful condition am I fallen into, who am accused to have been the death of my supposed child already, and now shall be the death of my own! If there were no loss of my child, yet how can I endure this torment of mine own bowels? How can I live to see this part of myself, sprawling under that bloody sword?' And, while she thinks thus, she sues to that suspected mercy of her just judge, 'O my lord, give her the living

child, and slay him not;' as thinking, 'If he live, he shall but change a mother; if he die, his mother loseth a son: while he lives, it shall be my comfort, that I have a son, though I may not call him so; dying, he perisheth to both: it is better he should live to a wrong mother, than to neither.' Contrarily, her envious competitor, as holding herself well satisfied that her neighbors hould be as childless as herself, can say, 'Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.' Well might Solomon and every hearer conclude, that, either she was no mother or a monster, that could be content with the murder of her child; and that if she could have been the true mother, and yet have desired the blood of her infant, she had been as worthy, to have been stripped of her child for so foul unnaturalness, as the other had been worthy to enjoy him for her honest compassion. Not more justly than wisely therefore, doth Solomon trace the true mother, by the footsteps of love and pity; and adjudgeth the child to those bowels, that had yearned at his danger.

Even in morality, it is thus also. Truth, as it is one, so it loves entireness; falsehood, division. Satan, that hath no right to the heart, would be content with a piece of it: God, that made it all, will have either the whole or none. The erroneous church strives with the true, for the living child of saving doctrine: each claims it for her own: heresy, conscious of her own injustice, could be content to go away with a leg or an arm of sound principles, as hoping to make up the rest with her own mixtures; truth cannot abide to part with a joint, and will rather endure to lose all by violence, than a piece through a willing connivancy.—1 Kings iii. 2 Chron. i.

THE TEMPLE.

It is a weak and injurious censure, that taxeth Solomon's slackness, in founding the house of God. Great bodies must have but slow motions. He was wise, that said, 'The matters must be all prepared without, ere we build within.' And if David have laid ready a great part of the metals and timber, yet many a tree must be felled and squared, and many a stone hewn and polished, ere this foundation could be laid; neither could those large

cedars be cut, sawn, seasoned, in one year; four years are soon gone, in so vast a preparation.

David had not been so entire a friend to Hiram, if Hiram had not been a friend to God. Solomon's wisdom hath taught him to make use of so good a neighbor, of a father's friend. He knew, that the Tyrians' skill was not given them for nothing. Not Jews only, but Gentiles, must have their hand, in building the temple of God: only Jews meddled with the tabernacle, but the temple is not built without the aid of Gentiles: they, together with us, make up the church of God.

Even pagans have their arts from heaven: how justly may we improve their graces, to the service of the God of heaven! If there be a Tyrian, that can work more curiously in gold, in silver, in brass, in iron, in purple, and blue silk, than an Israelite, why should not he be employed about the temple? Their heathenism is their own; their skill is their Maker's. Many a one works for the church of God, that yet hath no part in it.

Solomon raises a tribute for the work; not of money, but of men. Thirty thousand Israelites are levied for the service; yet not continually, but with intermission: their labor is more generous, and less pressing: it is enough if they keep their courses one month in Lebanon, two at home; so as ever ten thousand work, while twenty thousand breathe. So favorable is God to his creature, that he requires us not to be overtoiled, in the works of his own service. Due respirations are requisite in the holiest acts.

The main stress of the work lies on proselytes; whose both number and pains were herein more than the natives. A hundred and fifty thousand of them are employed, in bearing burdens, in hewing stones; besides their three thousand three hundred overseers. Now were the despised Gibeonites of good use; and in vain doth Israel wish, that the zeal of Saul had not robbed them of so serviceable drudges.

There is no man so mean, but may be some way useful to the house of God. Those, that cannot work in gold, and silver, and silk, yet may cut and hew; and those, that can do neither, yet may carry burdens. Even the

services that are more homely, are not less necessary. Who can dishearten himself, in the conscience of his own insufficiency, when he sees, God can as well serve himself of his labor, as of his skill.

The temple is framed in Lebanon, and set up in Sion. Neither hammer nor axe was heard in that holy structure. There was nothing but noise in Lebanon; nothing in Sion, but silence and peace. Whatever tumults are abroad, it is fit there should be all quietness and sweet concord in the church. O God, that the axes of schism, or the hammers of furious contentions, should be heard within thy sanctuary! Thy house is not built with blows: with blows, it is beaten down. Oh knit the hearts of thy servants together, 'in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace;' that we may mind and speak the same things; that thou, who art the God of peace, mayest take pleasure to dwell under the quiet roof of our hearts.

Now is the foundation laid, and the walls rising, of that glorious fabric, which all nations admired, and all times have celebrated. Even those stones, which were laid in the base of the building, were not ragged and rude, but hewn and costly. The part, that lies covered with earth from the eyes of all beholders, is no less precious, than those that are more conspicuous: God is not all for the eye: he pleaseth himself, with the hidden value of the living stones of his spiritual temple. How many noble graces of his servants have been buried in obscurity; not discerned so much as by their own eyes; which yet, as he gave, so he crowneth! Hypocrites regard nothing but show; God, nothing but truth.

The matter of so goodly a frame strives with the proportion, whether shall more excel: here was nothing but white marble without; nothing but cedar and gold within. On the hill of Sion stands that glittering and snowy pile, which both inviteth and dazzleth the eyes of passengers afar off: so much more precious within, as cedar is better than stone; gold, than cedar. No base thing goes to the making up of God's house. If Satan may have a dwelling, he cares not though he patch it up, of the rubbish of stone, or rotten sticks, or dross of metals: God will admit of nothing that is not pure and exquisite: his

church consists of none but the faithful; his habitation is in no heart but the gracious.

The fashion was no other than that of the tabernacle; only this was more costly, more large, more fixed: God was the same that dwelt in both; he varied not: the same mystery was in both. Only, it was fit, there should be a proportion, betwixt the work and the builder: the tabernacle was erected in a popular estate; the temple, in a monarchy: it was fit, this should savor of the munificence of a king, as that of the zeal of a multitude. That was erected in the flitting condition of Israel in the desert; this, in their settled residence in the promised land: it was fit therefore, that should be framed for motion; this, for rest. Both of them were distinguished into three remarkable divisions, whereof each was more noble, more reserved, than other.

But what do we bend our eyes on stone, and wood, and metals? God would never have taken pleasure in these dead materials, for their own sakes, if they had not had a further intendment.

Methinks I see four temples in this one. It is but one in matter; as the God that dwells in it is but one: three, yet more, in resemblance; according to division of them, in whom it pleaseth God to inhabit; for wherever God dwells, there is his temple. O God, thou vouchsafest to dwell in the believing heart. As we, thy silly creatures, have our being in thee, so thou, the Creator of heaven and earth, hast thy dwelling in us. The heaven of heavens is not able to contain thee; and yet, thou disdainest not to dwell in the strait lodgings of our renewed soul. So then, because God's children are many, and those many divided in respect of themselves though united in their head, therefore this temple, which is but one in collection, as God is one, is manifold in the distribution, as the saints are many; each man bearing about him a little shrine of this infinite majesty: and, for that the most general division of the saints is in their place and estate, some struggling and toiling in this earthly warfare, others triumphing in heavenly glory, therefore hath God two other more universal temples; one, the church of his saints on earth; the other, the highest heaven of his saints glorified. In all these, O God, thou

dwellest for ever, and this material house of thine is a clear representation of these three spiritual. Else, what were a temple made with hands unto the God of spirits? And though one of these was a true type of all, yet how are they all exceeded each by other! This of stone, though most rich and costly, yet what is it to the living temple of the Holy Ghost, which is our body? What is the temple of this body of ours, to the temple of Christ's body, which is his church? And what is the temple of God's church on earth, to that which triumpheth gloriously in heaven?

How easily do we see all these, in this one visible temple! which as it had three distinctions of rooms, the Porch, the Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, so is each of them answered spiritually: in the Porch, we find the regenerate soul entering into the blessed society of the church; in the Holy Place, the Communion of the true visible church on earth, selected from the world; in the Holy of Holies, whereinto the high-priest entered once a year, the glorious Heaven, into which our true high-priest, Christ Jesus, entered once for all, to make an atonement betwixt God and man.

In all these, what a meet correspondence there is, both in proportion, matter, situation!

In proportion:—The same rule, that skilful carvers observe in the cutting out of the perfect statue of a man, that the height be thrice the breadth, and the breadth one third of the height, was likewise duly observed in the fabric of the temple: whose length was double to the height, and treble to the breadth; as being sixty cubits long, thirty high, and twenty broad. How exquisite a symmetry hast thou ordained, O God, betwixt the faithful heart, and thy church on earth, with that in heaven: how accurate in each of these, in all their powers and parts, compared with other! So hath God ordered the believing soul, that it hath neither too much shortness of grace, nor too much height of conceit, nor too much breadth of passion. So hath he ordered his visible church, that there is a necessary inequality, without any disproportion; a height of government, a length of extent, a breadth of jurisdiction, duly answerable to each other: so hath he

ordered his triumphant church above, that it hath a length of eternity, answered with a height of perfection, and a breadth of incomprehensible glory.

In matter:—All was here of the best. The wood was precious, sweet, lasting; the stones beautiful, costly, insensible of age; the gold pure and glittering: so are the graces of God's children; excellent in their nature, dear in their acceptation, eternal in their use: so are the ordinances of God in his church; holy, comfortable, irrefragable: so is the perfection of his glorified saints; incomparable, unconceivable.

In situation:—The outer parts were here more common; the inward more holy, and peculiarly reserved. I find one court of the temple open to the unclean, to the uncircumcised: within that, another, open only to the Israelites; and, of them, to the clean: within that, yet another, proper only to the priests and Levites; where was the brazen altar for sacrifice, and the brazen sea for washings; the eyes of the laity might follow their oblations in hither, their feet might not: yet more, in the covered rooms of the temple, there is, whither the priests only may enter, not the Levites; there is, whither the high priest only may enter, not his brethren. It is thus in every renewed man, the individual temple of God: the outward parts are allowed common to God and the world; the inwardest and secretest, which is the heart, is reserved only for the God that made it. It is thus in the church visible: the false and foul-hearted hypocrite hath access to the holy ordinances of God, and treads in his courts; only the true Christian hath entire and private conversation, with the Holy One of Israel; he only is admitted into the Holy of Holies, and enters within the glorious veil of heaven.

If, from the walls, we look unto the furniture; what is the altar, whereon our sacrifices of prayer and praises are offered to the Almighty, but a contrite heart? What the golden candlesticks, but the illumined understanding, wherein the light of the knowledge of God and his divine will shineth for ever? What the tables of show-bread, but the sanctified memory, which keepeth the bread of life continually? Yea, if we shall presume so

far, as to enter into the very closet of God's oracle, even there, O God, do we find our unworthy hearts so honored by thee, that they are made the very ark, wherein thy royal law and the pot of thy heavenly manna are kept for ever; and from whose propitiatory, shaded with the wings of thy glorious angels, thou givest thy gracious testimonies of thy good Spirit, witnessing with ours, that we are the children of thee the living God.

Behold, if Solomon built a temple unto thee, thou hast built a temple unto thyself, in us. We are not only, through thy grace, living stones in thy temple, but living temples in thy Sion. Oh do thou ever dwell in this thy house; and in this thy house, let us ever serve thee. Wherefore else hast thou a temple, but for thy presence with us, and for our worshipping of thee? The time was, when, as thy people, so thyself, didst lodge in flitting tents; ever shifting, ever moving: thence, thou thoughtest best to sojourn, both in Shiloh and the roof of Obed Edom. After that, thou condescendedst to settle thine abode with men, and wouldst dwell in a house of thine own, at thy Jerusalem. So didst thou, in the beginning, lodge with our first parents in a tent; sojourn with Israel, under the Law; and now makest a constant residence, under the Gospel, in the hearts of thy chosen children, from whence thou wilt remove no more: they shall remove from the world, from themselves; thou shalt not remove from them.

Wheresoever thou art, O God, thou art worthy of adoration. Since thou ever wilt dwell in us, be thou ever worshipped in us. Let the altars of our clean hearts send up ever to thee, the sweetest perfumed smokes of our holy meditations, and faithful prayers, and cheerful thanksgivings. Let the pure lights of our faith and godly conversation shine ever before thee and men, and never be put out. Let the bread of life stand ever ready, on the pure and precious tables of our hearts. Lock up thy law and thy manna within us; and speak comfortably to us from thy mercy-seat. Suffer nothing to enter in hither, that is unclean. Sanctify us unto thyself, and be thou sanctified in us.—1 Kings v. vi. 2 Chron. ii. iii. iv.

SOLOMON, AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

God hath no use of the dark lanterns of secret reserved perfections: we ourselves do not light up candles to put them under bushels. The great lights, whether of heaven or earth, are not intended to obscurity; but, as to give light unto others, so to be seen themselves.

Dan and Beersheba were too strait bounds for the fame of Solomon; which now hath flown over all lands and seas, and raised the world to an admiration of his more than human wisdom. Even so, O thou everlasting King of Peace, thy name is great among the Gentiles. There is no speech nor language, where the report of thee is not heard: the sound of thee is gone forth through all the earth. Thy name is an ointment poured out; therefore the virgins love thee.

No doubt, many, from all coasts, came to learn and wonder; none, with so much note, as this noble daughter of Cham: who, herself, deserves the next wonder to him, whom she came to hear and admire. That a woman, a princess, a rich and great queen, should travel from the remotest south, from Saba, a region famous for the greatest delicacies of nature, to learn wisdom, is a matchless example. We know merchants, that venture to either Indies for wealth; others, we know daily to cross the seas, for wanton curiosity; some few philosophers, we have known to have gone far for learning; and, amongst princes, it is no unusual thing, to send their ambassadors to far distant kingdoms, for transaction of businesses, either of state or commerce: but, that a royal lady should, in person, undertake and overcome so tedious a journey, only to observe and inquire into the mysteries of nature, art, religion, is a thing past both parallel and imitation. Why do we think any labor great, or any way long, to hear a greater than Solomon? How justly shall the queen of the south rise up in judgment and condemn us, who may hear wisdom crying in our streets, and neglect her!

Certainly, so wealthy a queen, and so great a lover of wisdom, could not want great scholars at home: them she had first opposed, with her enigmatical demands: and now, finding herself unsatisfied, she takes herself to this

oracle of God. It is a good thing to doubt; better, to be resolved:-the mind that never doubts shall learn nothing; the mind that ever doubts shall never profit by learning: our doubts only serve to stir us up to seek truth; our resolutions settle us in the truth we have found. There were no pleasure in resolutions, if we had not been formerly troubled with doubts; there were nothing but discomfort and disquietness in doubts, if it were not for the hope of resolution. It is not safe, to suffer doubts to dwell too long on the heart: there may be a good use of them as passengers; dangerous, as inmates: happy are we, if we can find a Solomon to remove them.

Fame, as it is always a blab, so oftimes a liar. The wise princess found cause to distrust so uncertain an informer; whose reports are still either doubtful or fabulous, and, like winds or streams, increase in passing. If very great things were not spoken of Solomon, fame should have wronged him; and if but just rumors were spread of his wisdom, there needed much credulity to believe them. This great queen would not suffer herself to be led by the ears; but comes in person, to examine the truth of foreign relations. How much more unsafe is it, in the most important businesses of our souls, to trust the opinions and reports of others! Those ears and eyes are ill bestowed, that do not serve to choose and judge for their owners.

When we come to a rich treasure, we need not be bidden to carry away what we are able. This wise lady, as she came far for knowledge, so, finding the plenty of this vein, she would not depart without her full load: there was nothing, wherein she would leave herself unsatisfied: she knew that she could not every day meet with a Solomon, and therefore she makes her best use of so learned a master: now she empties her heart of all her doubts, and fills it with instruction. It is not good neglecting the opportunities, of furnishing our souls with profitable, with saving knowledge. There is much wisdom, in moving a question well, though there be more in assoiling it: what use do we make of Solomon's teacher, if, sitting at the feet of Christ, we leave our hearts either ignorant or perplexed?

As if the errand of this wealthy queen had been to buy

wisdom, she came with her camels laden with gold, and precious stones, and rich odors: though to a mighty king, she will not come to school empty handed. If she came to fetch an invaluable treasure, she finds it reason to give thanks unto him that kept it. As he is a fool, that hath a price in his hand to get wisdom, and wants a heart; so is he unthankful, that hath a heart to get wisdom, and hath no price in his hand; a price, not countervailable to what he seeks, but retributory to him of whom he seeks. How shameful is it, to come always with close hands to them, that teach us the great mysteries of salvation!

Expectation is no better than a kind enemy to good deserts. We lose those objects which we overlook. Many had been admired, if they had not been overmuch befriended by fame; who now, in our judgment, are cast as much below their rank, as they were fore-imagined above it. This advantage had wise Solomon with this stranger, whom rumor had bid to look for incredible excellencies; yet, so wonderful were the graces of Solomon, that they overcame the highest expectation, and the liberallest belief; so as when she saw the architecture of his buildings, the provisions of his tables, the order of his attendants, the religion of his sacrifices, she confessed, both her unjust incredulity in not believing the report of his wisdom, and the injury of report in under-rating it; 'I believed not the words till I came, and mine eyes had seen it, and lo, the one half was not told me.' Her eyes were more sure informers than her ears. She did not so much hear as see Solomon's wisdom, in these real effects. His answers did not so much demonstrate it, as his prudent government. There are some, whose speeches are witty, while their carriage is weak; whose deeds are incongruities, while their words are apophthegms. It is not worth the name of wisdom, that may be heard only, and not seen: good discourse is but the froth of wisdom; the pure and solid substance of it, is in well-framed actions: 'If we know these things, happy are we if we do them.'

And if this great person admired the wisdom, and buildings, the domestic order of Solomon, and chiefly his stately ascent into the house of the Lord, how should our

souls be taken up with wonder at thee, O thou true Son of David, and Prince of everlasting Peace, who receivedst the Spirit not by measure! who hast built this glorious house, not made with hands, even the heaven of heavens! whose infinite providence hath sweetly disposed of all the family of thy creatures both in heaven and earth! and who, lastly, didst ascend up on high, and leddest captivity captive, and gavest gifts to men!

So well had this studious lady profited by the lectures of that exquisite master, that now she envies, she magnifies, none but them, who may live within the air of Solomon's wisdom; 'Happy are the men, and happy are thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom;' as if she could have been content, to have changed her throne for the footstool of Solomon. It is not easy to conceive, how great a blessing it is, to live under those lips, which do both preserve knowledge and utter it: if we were not glutted with good counsel, we should find no relish in any worldly contentment, in comparison thereof; but, 'He that is full despiseth a honeycomb.'

She, whom her own experience had taught how happy a thing it is to have a skilful pilot sitting at the stern of the state, blesseth Israel for Solomon, blesseth God for Israel, blesseth Solomon and Israel mutually in each other; 'Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.'

It was not more Solomon's advancement to be king of Israel, than it was the advancement of Israel to be governed by a Solomon. There is no earthly proof of God's love to any nation, comparable to the substitution of a wise and pious governor: to him we owe our peace, our life, and, which is deservedly dearer, the life of our souls, the Gospel. But, O God, how much hast thou loved thine Israel for ever, in that thou hast set over it that righteous branch of Jesse, whose name is 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace: in whose days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely! Sing, O heaven, and re-

joice, O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains, for God hath comforted his people, and will have everlasting mercy on his afflicted.'

The queen of Sheba did not bring her gold and precious stones to look on, or to re-carry, but to give to a wealthier than herself. She gives therefore to Solomon a hundred and twenty talents of gold, besides costly stones and odors. He, that made silver in Jerusalem as stones, is yet richly presented on all hands. The rivers still run into the sea: to him that hath shall be given. How should we bring unto thee, O thou King of heaven, the purest gold of thine own graces, the sweetest odors of our obediences! Was not this withal a type of that homage, which should be done unto thee, O Saviour, by the heads of the nations? 'The kings of Tarshish and the isles bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Saba bring gifts; yea, all kings shall worship thee, all nations shall serve thee.' They cannot enrich themselves, but by giving unto thee.

It could not stand with Solomon's magnificence, to receive rich courtesies without a return. The greater the person was, the greater was the obligation of requital. The gifts of mean persons are taken but as tributes of duty: it is dishonorable, to take from equals, and not to retribute. There was not therefore more freedom in her gift, than in her receipt: her own will was the measure of both. She gave what she would; she received whatsoever she would ask: and she had little profited by Solomon's school, if she had not learned to ask the best: she returns therefore, more richly laden than she came: she gave to Solomon, as a thankful client of wisdom; Solomon returns to her, as a munificent patron, according to the liberality of a king. We shall be sure to be gainers, by whatsoever we give unto thee, O thou God of wisdom and peace. Oh that we could come from the remote regions of our infidelity and worldliness, to learn wisdom of thee, who both teachest and givest it abundantly, without upbraiding, without grudging; and could bring with us the poor presents, of our faithful desires and sincere services: how wouldst thou receive us, with a gracious acceptation; and send us away, laden with

present comfort, with eternal glory!—1 Kings x. 2 Chron. ix.

SOLOMON'S DEFECTION.

Since the first man Adam, the world hath not yielded, either so great an example of wisdom, or so fearful an example of apostacy, as Solomon. What human knowledge Adam had, in the perfection of nature by creation, Solomon had by infusion; both fully, both from one fountain. If Adam called all creatures by their names, Solomon 'spake from the cedars of Lebanon to the moss that springs out of the wall;' and besides these vegetables, there was no beast, nor fowl, nor fish, nor creeping thing, that escaped his discourse. Both fell; both fell by one means: as Adam, so might Solomon have said, 'The woman deceived me.' It is true indeed, that Adam fell as all; Solomon, as one; yet so as that this one is the pattern of the frailty of all. If knowledge could have given an immunity from sin, both had stood.

Affections are those feet of the soul, on which it either stands or falls. 'Solomon loved many outlandish women:' I wonder not, if the wise king miscarried. Every word hath bane enough for a man: women; many women; outlandish; idolatrous; and those not only had but doted on. Sex, multitude, nation, condition, all conspired to the ruin of a Solomon. If one woman undid all mankind, what marvel is it, if many women undid one? Yet had those many been the daughters of Israel, they had tempted him only to lust; not to mis-devotion: now they were of those nations, whereof the Lord had said to the children of Israel, 'Go not ye in to them, nor let them come in to you; for surely they will turn your hearts after their gods.' To them did Solomon join in love: who can marvel, if they disjoined his heart from God.

Satan hath found this bait to take so well, that he never changed it, since he crept into Paradise. How many have we known, whose heads have been broken with their own rib! In the first world, the sons of God saw the daughters of men, and took them wives of all they liked: they multiplied not children, but iniquities. Balaam knew well, if the dames of Moab could make the Israelites

wantons, they should soon make them idolaters. All lies open, where the covenant is not both made with the eye, and kept.

It was the charge of God to the kings of Israel before they were, that they should not multiply wives. Solomon had gone beyond the stakes of the law; and now is ready to lose himself, amongst a thousand bedfellows. Whoso lays the reins on the neck of his carnal appetite, cannot promise where he will rest.

O Solomon, where was thy wisdom, while thine affections run away with thee into so wild a voluptuousness? What boots it thee to discourse of all things, while thou mis-knowest thyself? The perfections of speculation do not argue the inward powers of self-government. The eye may be clear, while the hand is palsied. It is not so much to be heeded, how the soul is informed, as how it is disciplined: the light of knowledge doth well, but the due order of the affections doth better. Never any mere man since the first knew so much as Solomon; many, that have known less, have had more command of themselves. A competent estate well husbanded, is better than a vast patrimony neglected.

There can be no safety to that soul, where is not a strait curb on our desires. If our lusts be not held under as slaves, they will rule as tyrants. Nothing can prevent the extremity of our miscarriage, but early and strong denials of our concupiscence. Had Solomon done thus, delicacy and lawless greatness had not led him into these bogs of intemperance.

The ways of youth are steep and slippery, wherein, as it is easy to fall, so it is commonly relieved with pity; but the wanton inordinations of age are not more unseasonable than odious: yet behold Solomon's younger years were studious and innocent; his over-hastened age was licentious and misgoverned; 'For, when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.' If any age can secure us from the danger of a spiritual fall, it is our last; and if any man's old age might secure him, it was Solomon's; the beloved of God, the oracle, the miracle of wisdom. Who would have looked, but that the blossoms of so hopeful a spring, should have

yielded a goodly and pleasant fruit, in the autumn of age? yet behold, even Solomon's old age vicious. There is no time wherein we can be safe, while we carry this body of sin about us: youth is impetuous; mid-age, stubborn; old age, weak; all, dangerous. Say not now; 'The fury of my youthful flashes is over: I shall henceforth find my heart calm and impregnable;' while thou seest old Solomon doting on his concubines, yea, on their idolatry.

It is no presuming on time, nor means, nor strength. How many have begun and proceeded well, who yet have shamed themselves in their last stage! If God uphold us not, we cannot stand: if God uphold us, we cannot fall. When we are at the strongest, it is the best to be weak in ourselves; and when at our weakest, strong in him, in whom we can do all things.

I cannot yet think so hard of Solomon, that he would project his person to Ashteroth the goddess of the Sidonians, or Milcom the idol of the Ammonites, or Chemosh the abomination of Moab. He, that knew all things from the shrub to the cedar, could not be ignorant, that these statues were but stocks, or stones, or metals; and the powers resembled by them, devils. It is not like he could be so insensate, to adore such deities; but so far was the uxorious king blinded with affection, that he gave not passage only to the idolatry of his heathenish wives, but furtherance.

So did he dote on their persons, that he humored them in their sins: their act is therefore his, because his eyes winked at it; his hand advanced it. He, that built a temple to the living God for himself and Israel in Sion, built a temple to Chemosh in the Mount of Scandal, for his mistresses of Moab, in the very face of God's house. No hill about Jerusalem was free from a chapel of devils. Each of his dames had their puppets, their altars, their incense. Because Solomon feeds them in their superstition, he draws the sin home to himself, and is branded for what he should have forbidden. Even our very permission appropriates crimes to us. We need no more guiltiness of any sin, than our willing toleration.

Who can but yearn and fear, to see the woful wreck

of so rich and goodly a vessel! O Solomon, wert not thou he, whose younger years God honored with a message and style of love? to whom God twice appeared; and, in a gracious vision, renewed the covenant of his favor? whom he singled out from all the generation of men, to be the founder of that glorious temple, which was no less clearly the type of heaven, than thou wert of Christ, the Son of the ever-living God? Wert not thou that deep sea of wisdom, which God ordained to send forth rivers and fountains, of all divine and human knowledge, to all nations, to all ages? Wert not thou one of those select secretaries, whose hand it pleased the Almighty to employ, in three pieces of the divine monuments of Sacred Scriptures? Which of us dares ever hope to aspire unto thy graces? Which of us can promise to secure ourselves from thy ruins? We fall, O God, we fall to the lowest hell, if thou prevent us not, if thou sustain us not. 'Uphold thou me, according to thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' All our weakness is in ourselves; all our strength is in thee. O God, be thou strong in our weakness, that our weak knees may be ever steady in thy strength.

But in the midst of the horror of this spectacle, able to affright all the sons of men, behold some glimpse of comfort. Was it of Solomon, that David his father prophesied, 'Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand?' If sensible grace, yet final mercy was not taken from that beloved of God: in the hardest of this winter, the sap was gone down to the root, though it showed not in the branches. Even while Solomon removed, that word stood fast, 'He shall be my son, and I will be his father.' He, that foresaw his sin, threatened and limited his correction; 'If he break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit his transgression with a rod, and his iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant will I not break; nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth.'

Behold, the favor of God doth not depend on Solomon's obedience: if Solomon shall suffer his faithfulness to fail towards his God, God will not requite him, with the failing of his faithfulness to Solomon: if Solomon break his covenant with God, God will not break his covenant with the father of Solomon, with the son of David: he shall smart; he shall not perish. O gracious word of the God of all mercies; able to give strength to the languishing; comfort to the despairing; to the dying, life! Whatsoever we are, thou wilt be still thyself, O Holy One of Israel; true to thy covenant, constant to thy decree: the sins of thy chosen can neither frustrate thy counsel, nor outstrip thy mercies.

Now I see Solomon, of a wanton lover, a grave preacher of mortification. I see him quenching those inordinate flames, with the tears of his repentance. Methinks I hear him sighing deeply, betwixt every word of that his solemn penance, which he would needs enjoin himself before all the world; 'I have applied my heart to know the wickedness of folly, even the foolishness of madness; and I find more bitter than death, the woman, whose heart is as nets and snares, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall be delivered from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.'

Solomon was taken as a sinner; delivered, as a penitent. His soul escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare was broken, and he delivered. It is good for us, that he was both taken and delivered; taken, that we might not presume; and, that we might not despair, delivered. He sinned, that we might not sin; he recovered, that we may not sink under our sin.

But, Oh the justice of God inseparable from his mercy! Solomon's sin shall not escape the rod of men. Rather than so wise an offender shall want enemies, God shall raise up three adversaries unto Solomon; Hadad the Edomite, Rezon the king of Aram, Jeroboam the son of Nebat; whereof, two were foreign, one domestical. Nothing but love and peace sounded in the name of Solomon; nothing else was found in his reign, while he held in good terms with his God: but when once he fell foul with his Maker, all things began to be troubled. There are whips

laid up against the time of Solomon's foreseen offence, which are now brought forth for his correction. On purpose was Hadad the son of the king of Edom hid in a corner of Egypt from the sword of David and Joab, that he might be reserved for a scourge to the exorbitant son of David. God would have us make account, that our peace ends with our innocence. The same sin, that sets debate betwixt God and us, arms the creatures against us. It were pity we should be at any quiet, while we are fallen out with the God of peace.—1 Kings xi.

BOOK XVIII.

REHOBOAM.

Who would not but have looked, that seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines, should have furnished Solomon's palace with choice of heirs, and have peopled Israel with royal issue? And now behold, Solomon hath by all these but one son, and him by an Ammonitess. Many a poor man hath a house full of children, by one wife; while this great king hath but one son, by many housefuls of wives. Fertility is not from the means, but from the author. It was for Solomon, that David sung of old, 'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward.' How oft doth God deny this heritage of heirs, where he gives the largest heritage of lands; and gives most of these living possessions, where he gives least of the dead: that his blessings may be acknowledged free unto both; entailed on neither!

As the greatest persons cannot give themselves children, so the wisest cannot give their children wisdom. Was it not of Rehoboam that Solomon said, 'I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; and who knoweth, whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet he shall rule over all my labor, wherein I have labored, and showed myself wise, under the sun.' All Israel found that Solomon's wit was not propagated. Many a fool hath

had a wiser son, than this wisest father. Amongst many sons, it is no news to find some one defective: Solomon hath but one son, and he no miracle of wisdom. God gives purposely so eminent an instance, to teach men to look up to heaven, both for heirs and graces.

Solomon was both the king of Israel and the father of Rehoboam, when he was scarce out of his childhood; Rehoboam enters into the kingdom at a ripe age; yet Solomon was the man, and Rehoboam the child. Age is no just measure of wisdom. There are beardless sages, and grey-headed children. Not the ancient are wise, but the wise is ancient.

Israel wanted not for thousands, that were wiser than Rehoboam; yet, because they knew him to be the son of Solomon, no man makes question of his government. In the case of succession into kingdoms, we may not look into the qualities of the person, but into the right.

So secure is Solomon of the people's fidelity to David's seed, that he follows not his father's example, in setting his son by him, in his own throne: here was no danger of a rivalry, to enforce it; no eminency in the son, to merit it: it sufficeth him, to know that no bond can be surer, than the natural allegiance of subjects.

I do not find, that the following kings stood on the confirmation of their people; but, as those that knew the way to their throne, ascended their steps without aid. As yet the sovereignty of David's house was green and unsettled; Israel therefore doth not now come to attend Rehoboam, but Rehoboam goes up to meet Israel.

They come not to his Jerusalem, but he goes to their Shechem: 'To Shechem were all Israel come to make him king.' If loyalty drew them together, why not rather to Jerusalem? there, the majesty of his father's temple, the magnificence of his palace, the very stones in those walls, besides the strength of his guard, had pleaded strongly for their subjection. Shechem had been, many ways, fatal; was, every way, incommodious. It is an infinite help or disadvantage, that arises from circumstances. The very place puts Israel in mind of a rebellion. There, Abimelech had raised up his treacherous usurpation over and against his brethren: there, Gaal against Abimelech:

there, was Joseph sold by his brethren: as if the very soil had been stained with perfidiousness. The time is no less ill chosen. Rehoboam had ill counsel, ere he bewrayed it; for had he speedily called up Israel, before Jeroboam could have been sent for out of Egypt, he had found the way clear. A little delay may lose a great deal of opportunity. What shall we say of both, but that misery is led in by infatuation?

Had not Israel been somewhat predisposed to a mutiny, they had never sent into Egypt, for such a spokesman as Jeroboam; a fugitive, a traitor to Solomon. Long had that crafty conspirator lurked in a foreign court. The alliances of princes are not ever necessary bonds of friendship. The brother-in-law of Solomon harbors this snake in his bosom, and gives that heat, which is repaid with a sting, to the posterity of so near an ally. And now Solomon's death calls him back to his native soil. That Israel would entertain a rebel, it was an ill sign; worse yet, that they will countenance him; worst of all, that they would employ him. Nothing doth more bewray evil intentions, than the choice of vicious agents. Those, that mean well, will not hazard, either the success or credit of their actions on offensive instruments. None but the sluttish will wipe their faces with foul clothes. Upright hearts would have said, as David did to God, so to his anointed; 'Do not I hate them, that hate thee? Yea, I hate them, with a perfect hatred.' Jeroboam's head had been a fit present, to have been tendered unto their new king; and now, instead thereof, they tender themselves to Jeroboam, as the head of their faction.

Had not Rehoboam wanted spirits, he had first, after Solomon's example, done justice to his father's traitor, and then have treated of mercy towards his subjects.

The people soon found the weakness of their new sovereign; else they durst not have spoken to him by so obnoxious a tongue; 'Thy father made our yoke grievous; make thou it lighter, and we will serve thee.'

Doubtless the crafty head of Jeroboam was in this suit, which his mouth uttered in the name of Israel. Nothing could have been more subtle: it seemed a promise; it was a threat. That, which seemed a supplication, was a

complaint: humility was but a vail of discontentment: one hand held a paper; the other, a sword. Had they said, 'Free us from tributes,' the capitulation had been gross, and strongly savoring of sedition: now they say, 'Ease us,' they profess his power to impose, and their willingness to yield; only craving favor in the weight of the imposition. If Rehoboam yield, he blemishes his father; if he deny, he endangers his kingdom: his wilfulness shall seem worthily to abandon his sceptre, if he stick at so unreasonable a suit. Surely Israel came with a purpose to cavil. Jeroboam had secretly troubled these waters, that he might fish more gainfully: one malcontent is enough to embroil a whole kingdom.

How harshly must it needs sound in the ears of Rehoboam, that the first word he hears from his people, is a querulous challenge of his father's government; 'Thy father made our yoke grievous!'

For aught I see, the suggestion was not more spiteful, than unjust. Where was the weight of this yoke, the toil of the services? Here were none of the turmoils of war: no trainings, marchings, encampings, entrenchings, watchings, minings, sieges, fortifications: none of that tedious world of work, that attends hostility. Solomon had not his name for nought. All was calm during that long reign; and if they had paid dear for their peace, they had no cause to complain of a hard match. The warlike times of Saul and David had exhausted their blood, together with their substance. What ingratitude was this, to cry out of ease! 'Yea, but that peace brought forth costly and laborious buildings. God's house and the king's, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazar, Megiddo, and Gezer, the cities of store, the cities of defence, could not rise without many a shoulder.' True; but not of any Israelites. The remainders of Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, were put to all the drudgery of these great works. The tasks of Israel were easy and ingenuous; free from servility, free from painfulness. 'But the charge was theirs, whosesoever was the labor. The diet of so endless a retinue, the attendance of his seraglio, the purveyance for his forty thousand stables, the cost of his sacrifices, must needs weigh heavy.' Certainly; if it had lain on none but his

own. But wherefore went Solomon's navy every three years to Ophir? To what use served the six hundred threescore and six talents of gold, that came in one year to his exchequer? Wherefore served the large tributes of foreign nations? How did he make silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, if the exactions were so pressive? The multitude is ever prone to pick quarrels with their governors; and, whom they feared alive, to censure dead. The benefits of so quiet and happy a reign are passed over in silence; the grievances are recounted with clamor. Who can hope, that merit or greatness can shield from obloquy, when Solomon is traduced to his own loins?

The proposition of Israel puts Rehoboam to a deliberation; 'Depart ye for three days; then come again to me.' I hear no other word of his, that argued wisdom. Not to give sudden resolutions in cases of importance, was a point that might well beseem the son of Solomon. I wonder that he, who had so much wit as to call for leisure in his answer, should show so little wit, in the improving of that leisure, in the return of that answer.

Who cannot but hope well, to see the grey heads of Solomon's secret council called to Rehoboam's cabinet? As counsellors, as ancient, as Solomon's, they cannot choose but see the best, the safest course, for their new sovereign. They had learned of their old master, that 'a soft answer appeaseth wrath;' wisely therefore do they advise him, 'If thou wilt be a servant to this people this day, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever.'

It was an easy condition; with one mouthful of a breath, to purchase an everlasting homage; with one gentle motion of his tongue, to bind all people's hearts to his allegiance for ever. Yet, as if the motion had been unfit, a new council table is called. Well might this people say; 'What will not Rehoboam grudge us, if he think much to give good words for a kingdom?'

There is not more wisdom, in taking variety of advice, where the matter is doubtful, than folly, when it is plain. The young heads are consulted. This very change argues weakness. Some reason might be pleaded, for passing from the younger counsel to the aged; none, for the con-

trary. Age brings experience; and, it is a shame, if, with the ancient be not wisdom: youth is commonly rash, heady, insolent, ungoverned, wedded to will, led by humor, a rebel to reason, a subject to passion, fitter to execute than to advise. Green wood is ever shrinking and warping; whereas the well-seasoned holds a constant firmness.

Many a life, many a soul, many a florishing state, hath been ruined by undisciplined monitors. Such were these of Rehoboam; whose great stomach tells them, that this conditionating of subjects was no other than an affront to their new master; and suggests to them, how unfit it is for majesty to brook so saucy a treaty, how requisite and princely to crush this presumption in the egg: as scorning therefore to be braved by the base vulgar, they put words of greatness and terror in their new prince; 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. My father made your yoke heavy; I will add to your yoke. My father hath chastised you with whips; I will chastise you with scorpions.' The very words have stings.

Now must Israel needs think, 'How cruel will this man's hand be, when he thus draws blood with his tongue! Men are not wont to speak out their worst: who can endure the hopes of him, that promiseth tyranny?' There can be no good use, of an indefinite profession of rigor and severity. Fear is an unsafe guardian of any state; much less, of an unsettled. Which was yet worse; not the sins of Israel were threatened, nor their purses, but their persons; neither had they desired a remission of justice, but of exactions; and now they hear of nothing but burdens, and scourges, and scorpions.

Here was a prince and a people well met. I do not find them sensible of aught, save their own profit. They do not say, 'Religion was corrupted, in the shutting up of thy father's days. Idolatry found the free favor of priests, and temples, and sacrifices. Begin thy reign with God; purge the church; demolish those piles of abomination; abandon those idol-mongers; restore devotion to her purity.' They are all for their penny, for their ease: he, on the other side, is all for his will, for an imperious sovereignty; without any regard, either of their reforma-

tion or satisfaction. They were worthy of load, that cared for nothing but their backs: and he worthy of such subjects, who professed to affect their misery and torment.

Who would not but have looked any whither for the cause of this evil, rather than to heaven? yet the holy God challenges it to himself; 'The cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying by Abijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam.' As sin is a punishment of sin, it is a part of justice. The Holy One of Israel doth not abhor, to use even the grossest sins to his own just purposes: while our wills are free to our own choice, his decrees are as necessary as just. Israel had forsaken the Lord, and worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Chemosh, and Milcom. God owes them and Solomon a whipping: the frowardness of Rehoboam shall pay it them. I see Jeroboam's plot, the people's insolence, the young men's misadvice, the prince's unreasonable austerity, meeting together, through the wise providence of the Almighty, unwittingly to accomplish his most just decree. All these might have done otherwise, for any force that was offered to their will; all would no more do otherwise, than if there had been no predetermination in heaven; that God may be magnified in his wisdom and justice, while man wittingly perisheth in his folly.

That three days' expectation had warmed these smoking Israelites, and made them ready for a combustion. On so peremptory a resolution of rigor, the flame bursts out, which all the waters of the well of Bethlehem could never quench. The furious multitude flies out into a desperate revolt; 'What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David.'

How durst these seditious mouths mention David in defiance? One would have thought, that very name had been able to have tempered their fury, and to have contained them within the limits of obedience. It was the father of Rehoboam and the son of David, that had led Israel into idolatry: Solomon hath drawn contempt on his father, and on the son. If Israel have cast off their God, is it marvel that they shake off his anointed? Irreligion is the way to disobedience. There can be no true

subjection, but out of conscience. They cannot make conscience of civil duties, who make none of divine.

In vain shall Rehoboam hope to prevail by his officer, when himself is rejected. The persons of princes carry in them characters of majesty: when their presence works not, how should that message? If Adoram solicit the people too late with good words, they answer him with stones. Nothing is more untractable and violent, than an enraged multitude. It was time for Rehoboam to betake himself to his chariot: he saw those stones were thrown at him, in his Adoram: as the messenger suffers for his master, so the master suffers in his messenger. Had Rehoboam been in Adoram's clothes, this death had been his. Only flight can deliver him, from those that might have been subjects. Jerusalem must be his refuge, against the conspiracy of Shechem.

Blessed be God, for lawful government. Even a mutinous body cannot want a head: if the rebellious Israelites have cast off their true sovereign, they must choose a false. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, must be the man. He had need be skilful and sit sure, that shall back the horse, which hath cast his rider. Israel could not have any where met with more craft and courage, than they found in this leader.

Rehoboam returns to Jerusalem, lighter by a crown than he went forth.

Judah and Benjamin stick still fast to their loyalty: the example of a general rebellion cannot make them unfaithful to the house of David. God will ever reserve a remnant free from the common contagion. Those tribes, to approve their valor, no less than their fidelity, will fight against their brethren for their prince; and will hazard their lives, to reduce the crown to the son of Solomon. A hundred and fourscore thousand of them are up in arms, ready to force Israel to their denied subjection. No noise sounded, on both parts, but military: no man thought of any thing, but blood: when, suddenly, God sends his prophet, to forbid the battle. Shemaiah comes with a message of cessation: 'Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me, saith the

Lord.' The word of one silly prophet dismisses these mighty armies. He, that would not lay down the threats of his rigor, on the advice of his ancient counsellors, will lay down his sword, on the word of a seer. Shall we envy or shame to see how much the prophets of the Old Testament could do; how little, those of the New? If our commission be no less from the same God, the difference of success cannot go away unrevenged.

There was yet some grace in Rehoboam, that he would not spurn against that, which God challenged as his own work. Some godless ruffian would have said; 'Whosoever is the author, I will be revenged on the instruments.' Rehoboam hath learned this lesson of his grandfather, 'I held my peace, because thou Lord hast done it.' If he might strive with the multitude, he knew it was no striving with his Maker: quietly therefore doth he lay down his arms; not daring after that prohibition, to seek the recovery of his kingdom by blood.

Where God's purposes are hid from us, we must take the fairest ways of all lawful remedies; but where God hath revealed his determinations, we must sit down in an humble submission: our struggling may aggravate, cannot redress our miseries.—1 Kings xii. 2 Chron. x.

JEROBOAM.

As there was no public and universal conflict, betwixt the ten tribes and the two, so no peace. Either king found reason to fortify the borders of his own territories.

Shechem was worthy to be dear to Jeroboam; a city, as of old seasoned with many treasons, so now auspicious to his new usurpation.

The civil defection was soon followed by the spiritual. As there are near respects betwixt God and his anointed, so there is great affinity betwixt treason and idolatry: there is a connexion, betwixt 'Fear God,' and 'Honor the King;' and no less, betwixt the neglects of both. In vain shall a man look for faith in a misreligious heart.

Next to Ahitophel, I do not find, that Israel yielded a craftier head than Jeroboam's; so hath he plotted this conspiracy, that, whatever fall, there is no place for a challenge: not his own intrusion, but Israel's election, hath

raised him to their throne. Neither is his cunning less, in holding a stolen sceptre. Thus he thinks in himself; 'If Israel have made me their king, it is but a pang of discontentment; these violent thoughts will not last always: sudden fits have commonly sudden recoveries. Their return to their loyalty shall forfeit my head, together with my crown: they cannot return to God, and hold off from their lawful sovereign: they cannot return to Jerusalem, and keep off from God, from their loyalty: thrice a year will their devotion call them up thither; besides the exigence of their frequent vows. How can they be mine, while that glorious temple is in their eye; while the magnificence of the royal palace of David and Solomon shall admonish them of their native allegiance; while, besides the solicitation of their brethren, the priests and Levites shall preach to them the necessity of their due obedience, and the abomination of their sacrifices in their wilful disobedience; while they shall, by their presence, put themselves on the mercy or justice of their lawful and forsaken prince? Either therefore, I must divert them from Jerusalem, or else I cannot live and reign. It is no diverting them by a direct restraint: such prohibition would both endanger their utter distaste, and whet their desire to more eagerness. I may change religion; I may not inhibit it: so the people have a God, it sufficeth them. They shall have so much formality, as may content them. Their zeal is not so sharp, but they can be well pleased with ease. I will proffer them, both a more compendious and more plausible worship. Jerusalem shall be supplied within mine own borders. Naturally, men love to see the objects of their devotion; I will therefore feed their eyes, with two golden representations of their God, nearer home; and what can be more proper than those, which Aaron devised of old to humor Israel?'

On this pestilent ground, Jeroboam sets up two calves, in Dan and Bethel; and persuades the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.'

Oh the mischief that comes of wicked infidelity! It was God's prophet, that had rent Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces, and had given ten of them to him, in

token of his sharing the ten tribes, who with the same breath also told him, that the cause of this distraction was their idolatry: yet now will he institute an idolatrous service, for the holding together of them, whom their idolatry had rent from their true sovereign to him. He says not, 'God hath promised me this kingdom; God hath conferred it; God shall find means to maintain his own act: I will obey him; let him dispose of me: the God of Israel is wise and powerful enough, to fetch about his own designs:' but, as if the devices of men were stronger than God's providence and ordination, he will be working out his own ends by profane policies.

Jeroboam, being born an Israelite, and bred in the court of a Solomon, could not but know the express charge of God, against the making of images, against the erecting of any rival altars to that of Jerusalem; yet now, that he sees both these may avail much to the advancing of his ambitious project, he sets up those images, those altars. Wicked men care not to make bold with God, in cases of their own commodity: if the laws of their Maker lie in the way of their profit or promotion, they either spurn them out, or tread on them at pleasure: aspiring minds will know no God but honor.

Israel sojourned in Egypt, and brought home a golden calf; Jeroboam sojourns there, and brought home two. It is hard to dwell in Egypt untainted: not to savor of the sins of the place we live in, is no less strange, than for wholesome liquor tunned up in a musty vessel, not to smell of the cask. The best body may be infected in a contagious air. Let him beware of Egypt, that would be free from idolatry.

No sooner are Jeroboam's calves up, than Israel is down on their knees: their worship follows immediately on the erection. How easily is the unstable vulgar carried into whatsoever religion of authority! The weathercock will look which way soever the wind blows. It is no marvel, if his subjects be brutish, who hath made a calf his god.

Every accessory to sin is filthy, but the first authors of sin are abominable. How is Jeroboam branded in every of these sacred leaves! How do all ages ring of his fact,

with the accent of dishonor and indignation; 'Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin!' It was a shame for Israel, that it could be made to sin by a Jeroboam; but, O cursed name of Jeroboam, that would draw Israel to sin! The followers and abettors of evil are worthy of torment; but no hell is too deep for the leaders of public wickedness.

Religion is clothed with many requisite circumstances. As a new king would have a new god, so that new god must have new temples, altars, services, priests, solemnities: all these hath Jeroboam instituted; all these hath he cast in the same mould with his golden calves. False devotion doth not more cross, than imitate, the true. Satan is no less a counterfeit, than an enemy, of God: he knows it more easy to adulterate religion, than to abolish it.

That, which God ordained for the avoidance of idolatry, is made the occasion of it; a limitation of his holy services to Jerusalem. How mischievously do wicked men pervert the wholesome institutions of God, to their sin, to their bane!

Jeroboam could not be ignorant, how fearfully this very act was revenged on Israel, in the wilderness; yet he dares renew it in Dan and Bethel. No example of judgment can affright wilful offenders.

It is not the metal, that makes their gods, but the worship, the sacrifices. What sacrifices could there be without priests? No religion could ever want sacred masters of divine ceremonies.

God's clergy was select and honorable; branches of the holy stem of Aaron: Jeroboam rakes up his priests out of the channel of the multitude; all tribes, all persons, were good enough for his spurious devotion. Leaden priests are well fitted to golden deities. Religion receives either much honor or blemish, by the quality of those that serve at her altars. We are not worthy to profess ourselves servants of the true God, if we do not hold his service worthy of the best.

Jeroboam's calves must have sacrifices, must have solemn festivities; though in a day and month of his own

devising. In vain shall we pretend to worship a god, if we grudge him the just days and rites of his worship.

It is strange, that he, who thought the dregs of the vulgar good enough for that priesthood, would grace those gods, by acting their priest himself; and yet behold where the new king of Israel stands before his new altar, with a sceptre in one hand and a censer in the other, ready to sacrifice to his new gods; when the man of God comes from Judah, with a message of judgment.

Oh desperate condition of Israel, that was so far gone with impiety, that it yielded not one faithful monitor to Jeroboam! The time was, that the erecting of but a new altar (for memory, for monument,) on the other side of Jordan, bred a challenge to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh; and had cost much Israelitish blood, if the quarrelled tribes had not given a seasonable and pious satisfaction; and now, lo, how the stronger stomach of degenerated Israel can digest new altars, new temples, new gods! What a difference there is, betwixt a church and kingdom newly breathing from affliction, and settled on the lees of a misused peace!

But oh the patience and mercy of our long-suffering God, that will not strike a very Jeroboam unwarned! Judgment hovers over the heads of sinners, ere it light. If Israel afford not a bold reprover of Jeroboam, Judah shall. When the king of Israel is in all the height, both of his state and superstition, honoring his solemn day with his richest devotion, steps forth a prophet of God, and interrupts that glorious service, with a loud inclamation of judgment.

Doubtless, the man wanted not wit to know what displeasure, what danger, must needs follow so unwelcome message; yet dares he, on the commission of God, do this affront to an idolatrous king, in the midst of all his awful magnificence. The prophets of God go on many a thankless errand. He is no messenger for God, that either knows or fears the faces of men.

It was the altar, not the person, of Jeroboam, which the prophet thus threatens; yet not the stones are stricken, but the founder, in both their apprehensions. So dear

are the devices of our own brains to us, as if they were incorporated into ourselves. There is no opposition whereof we are so sensible, as that of religion.

That the royal altar should be thus polluted, by dead men's bones and the blood of the priests, was not more unpleasing, than that all this should be done, by a child of the house of David; for Jeroboam well saw, that the throne and the altar must stand or fall together; that a son of David could not have such power over the altar, without an utter subversion of the government, of the succession; therefore is he thus galled, with this comminatory prediction.

The rebellious people, who had said, 'What portion have we in David?' hear now, that David will perforce have a portion in them; and might well see, what beasts they had made themselves, in worshipping the image of a beast, and sacrificing to such a god, as could not preserve his own altar from violation and ruin.

All this while, I do not see this zealous prophet laying his hand to the demolition of this idolatrous altar, or threatening a knife to the author of this depravation of religion: only his tongue smites both, not with foul, but sharp words; of menace, not of reproach. It was for Josiah a king, to shed the blood of those sacrificers, to deface those altars: prophets are for the tongue; princes for the hand: prophets must only denounce judgment; princes execute.

Future things are present to the Eternal. It was some two hundred and sixty years, ere this prophecy should be fulfilled; yet the man of God speaks of it as now in acting. What are some centuries of years to the Ancient of Days? How slow, and yet, how sure, is the pace of God's revenge! It is not in the power of time to frustrate God's determinations. There is no less justice nor severity in a delayed punishment.

What a perfect record there is of all names, in the roll of heaven; before they be, after they are past! Whatever seeming contingency there is in their imposition, yet they fall under the certainty of a decree, and are better known in heaven ere they be, than on earth while they are.

He, that knows what names we shall have before we or

the world have a being, doth not often reveal this piece of his knowledge to his creature: here he doth; naming the man, that should be two hundred years after; for more assurance of the event, that Israel may say, 'This man speaks from a God who knows what shall be.'

There cannot be a more sure evidence of a true Godhead, than the foreknowledge of those things, whose causes have yet no hope of being. But because the proof of this prediction was no more certain than remote, a present demonstration shall convince the future: 'The altar shall rend in pieces, the ashes shall be scattered.'

How amazedly must the seduced Israelites needs look on this miracle! And why do they not think with themselves, 'While these stones rend, why are our hearts whole?' Of what an overruling power is the God whom we have forsaken, that can thus tear the altars of his corivals! How shall we stand before his vengeance, when the very stones break at the word of his prophet?' Perhaps, some beholders were thus affected; but Jeroboam, whom it most concerned, instead of bowing his knees for humiliation, stretcheth forth his hand for revenge, and cries, 'Lay hold on him.' Resolute wickedness is impatient of a reproof; and, instead of yielding to the voice of God, rebelleth. Just and discreet reprehension doth not more reform some sinners, than exasperate others.

How easy it is for God, to cool the courage of proud Jeroboam! The hand, which his rage stretches out, dries up, and cannot be pulled back again: and now stands the king of Israel like some antique statue, in a posture of impotent endeavor; so disabled to the hurt of the prophet, that he cannot command that piece of himself! What are the great potentates of the world, in the powerful hand of the Almighty? Tyrants cannot be so harmful, as they are malicious.

The strongest heart may be brought down with affliction. Now the stout stomach of Jeroboam is fallen to an humble deprecation; 'Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again.' It must needs be a great strait, that could drive a proud heart to beg mercy, where he bent his persecution: so doth Jeroboam; holding it no scorn, to be

beholding to an enemy. In extremities, the worst men can be content, to sue for favor, where they have spent their malice.

It well becomes the prophets of God to be merciful. I do not see this seer, to stand on terms of exprobration and overly contestations with Jeroboam; to say, 'Thine intentions to me were cruel. Had thy hand prevailed, I should have sued to thee in vain. Continue ever a spectacle of the fearful justice of thy Maker, whom thou hast provoked by thine idolatry, whom thou wouldst have smitten in my persecution.' But he meekly sues for Jeroboam's release; and, that God might abundantly magnify both his power and mercy, is heard and answered with success. We do no whit savor of heaven, if we have not learned to do good for evil.

When both wind and sun, the blasts of judgment and the beams of favor, met together to work on Jeroboam, who would not look, that he should have cast off his cumbrous and mis-beseeming cloak of his idolatry; and have said, 'Lord, thou hast stricken me in justice; thou hast healed me in mercy: I will provoke thee no more: this hand, which thou hast restored, shall be consecrated to thee, in pulling down these bold abominations?' Yet now, behold he goes on in his old courses; and, as if God had neither done him good nor evil, lives and dies idolatrous. No stone is more hard or insensate, than a sinful heart. The changes of judgment and mercy do but obdure it, instead of melting.—1 Kings xii. xiii.

THE SEDUCED PROPHET.

Jeroboam's hand is amended; his soul is not: that continues still dry and inflexible. Yet, while he is unthankful to the Author of his recovery, he is thankful to the instrument: he kindly invites the prophet, whom he had threatened; and will remunerate him, whom he endeavored to punish. The worst men may be sensible of bodily favors: civil respects may well stand with gracelessness: many a one would be liberal of their purses, if they might be allowed to be niggardly of their obedience.

As God, so his prophet, cares not for these waste courtesies, where he sees main duties neglected: more piety

would have done well, with less compliment: the man of God returns a blunt and peremptory denial, to so bounteous an offer; 'If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place.' Kindness is more safely done to an idolater, than taken from him: that, which is done to him, obligeth him; that, which is taken from him, obligeth us: his obligation to us, may be occasion of his good; our obligation to him, may occasion our hurt: the surest way is, to keep aloof from the infectiously wicked.

The prophet is not uncivil, to reject the favor of a prince, without some reason. He yields no reason of his refusal, but the command of his God. God hath charged him, 'Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.' It is not for a prophet, to plead human or carnal grounds for the actions of his function: he may not move, but on a divine warrant.

Would this seer have looked with the eyes of flesh and blood, he might have found many arguments of his yieldance. 'He is a king that invites me: his reward, by enriching me, may benefit many; and who knows, how much my further conversation may prevail to reform him? How can he be but well prepared for good counsel, by a miraculous cure? How gainfully should my receipt of a temporal courtesy be exchanged with a spiritual to him! All Israel will follow him, either in idolatry or reformation: which way can be devised of doing so great service to God and the church, as by reclaiming him? what can yield so great likelihood of his reclamation, as the opportunity of my further entireness with him?' But the prophet dares not argue cases, where he had a command. Whatever become of Jeroboam and Israel, God must be obeyed. Neither profit nor hopes may carry us cross to the word of our Maker. How safe had this seer been, if he had kept him ever on this sure ward; which he no sooner leaves, than he miscarries.

So deeply doth God detest idolatry, that he forbids his prophet to eat the bread, to drink the water, of a people infected with this sin; yea, to tread in those very steps, which their feet have touched. If this inhibition were personal, yet the grounds of it are common. No pesti-

lence should be more shunned, than the conversation of the mis-religious, or openly scandalous: it is no thank to us, if their familiarity do not enfeoff us of their wickedness.

I know not what to think of an old prophet that dwells in Bethel, within the air of Jeroboam's idol, within the noise of his sacrifices; that lives, where the man of God dares not eat; that permitted his sons to be present at that idolatrous service. If he were a prophet of God, what did he now in Bethel? why did he wink at the sin of Jeroboam? what needed a seer to come out of Judah, for the reproof of that sin, which was acted under his nose? why did he lie? why did his family partake with idolaters? If he were not a prophet of God, how had he true visions, how had he true messages from God? why did he second the menacing word of that prophet, whom he seduced? why did he desire, that his own bones might be honored with his sepulchre? doubtless, he was a prophet of God; but corrupt, resty, vicious.

Prophecy doth not always presuppose sanctification. Many a one hath had visions from God, who shall never enjoy the vision of God. A very Balaam, in his ecstasies, hath so clear a revelation of the Messiah to come, as scarce ever any of the holiest prophets; yea, his very ass hath both her mouth miraculously opened and her eyes, to see and notify that angel, which was hid from her master: yea, Satan himself sometimes receives notice from God of his future actions, which else that evil spirit could neither foretell nor foresee. These kinds of graces are both rare and common: rare, in that they are seldom given to any; common, in that they are indifferently given to the evil and to the good. A little holiness is worth much illumination.

Whether out of envy, to hear that said by the seer of Judah which he either knew not or smothered, to hear that done by another which he could not have effected and could not choose but admire; or, whether out of desire to make trial of the fidelity of so powerful a messenger; the old prophet hastens to overtake, to recall, that man of God, who had so defied his Bethel: whom he finds sitting faint and weary under an oak, in the way; taking

the benefit of that shade, which he hated to receive from those contagious groves, that he had left behind him. His habit easily bewrayed him, to a man of his own trade; neither doth his tongue spare to profess himself.

The old prophet of Bethel invites him to return to a repast; and is answered with the same words, wherewith Jeroboam's offer was repelled. The man of God varies not a syllable from his message. It concerns us, to take good heed of our charge, when we go on God's errand.

A denial doth but invite the importunate. What he cannot do by entreaty, the old man tries to do by persuasion; 'I am a prophet also, as thou art, and an angel spake to me, by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' There is no temptation so dangerous, as that which comes shrouded under a veil of holiness, and pretends authority of God himself. Jeroboam threatens, the prophet stands undaunted; Jeroboam fawns and promises, the prophet holds constant: now comes a grey-headed seer and pleads a counter-message from God; the prophet yields and transgresses. Satan may affright us as a fiend, but he seduces us as an angel of light.

Who would have looked for a liar, under hoary hairs and a holy mantle? Who would not have trusted that gravity, when there was no color of any gain in the untruth? Nothing is so apt to deceive, as the fairest semblances, as the sweetest words. We cannot err, if we believe not the speech for the person, but the person for the speech.

Well might this man of God think, 'An aged man, a prophet, an old prophet, will not, sure, belie God unto a prophet. No man will forge a lie, but for an advantage. What can this man gain by this match, but the entertainment of an unprofitable guest? Perhaps, though God will not allow me to feast with Jeroboam, yet, pitying my faintness, he may allow me to eat with a prophet. Perhaps, now that I have approved my fidelity in refusing the bread of Bethel, God thinks good to send me a gracious release of that strict charge. Why should I think that God's revelations are not as free to others, as to me? And if this prophet have received a countermand from an

angel of God, how shall I not disobey God, if I do not follow him?'

On this ground, he returns with this deceitful host; and, when the meat was now in his mouth, receives the true message of death, from the same lips that brought him the false message of his invitation; 'Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, but camest back and hast eaten bread, and drunk water, in the place forbidden thee, thy carcass shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers.'

O woful prophet! When he looks on his host, he sees his executioner; while he is feeding of his body, he hears of his carcass; at the table, he hears of his denied sepulchre; and all this for eating and drinking where he was forbidden by God, though bidden as from God. The violation of the least charge of a God is mortal. No pretences can warrant the transgression of a divine command.

A word from God is pleaded on both sides: the one was received immediately from God; the other related mediately by man: one, the prophet was sure of; the other was questionable. A sure word of God may not be left, for an uncertain. An express charge of the Almighty admitteth not of any check. His will is but one, as himself is; and therefore, it is out of the danger of contradiction.

Methinks, I see the man of God change countenance, at this sharp sauce of his pleasing morsel. His face beforehand is died with the paleness of death. Methinks I hear him urging many unkind expostulations with his injurious host: who yet dismisses him, better provided for the ease of his journey, than he found him. Perhaps this officiousness was out of desire, to make some amends for this late seducement. It is a poor recompense, when he hath betrayed his life and wronged the soul, to cast some courtesies on the body.

The old Bethelite, that had taken pains to come and fetch the man of God into sin, will not now go back with him, to accompany his departure. Doubtless, he was afraid to be enwrapped in the judgment, which he saw hanged over that obnoxious head. Thus the mischievous guides

of wickedness leave a man, when they have led him to his bane; as familiar devils forsake their witches, when they have brought them once into fetters.

The man of God returns alone; careful, no doubt, and pensive, for his offence; when a lion out of the wood meets him, assaults him, kills him. Oh the just and severe judgments of the Almighty, who hath brought this fierce beast, out of his wild ranges into the highway, to be the executioner of his offending servant!

Doubtless, this prophet was a man of great holiness, of singular fidelity, else he durst not have been God's herald, to carry a message of defiance to Jeroboam, king of Israel, in the midst of his royal magnificence; yet now, for varying from but a circumstance of God's command, though on the suggestion of a divine warrant, is given for a prey to the lion. Our interest in God is so far from excusing our sin, that it aggravates it. Of all others, the sin of a prophet shall not pass unrevenged.

The very wild beasts are led by a providence. Their wise and powerful Creator knows how to serve himself of them. The lions guard one prophet, kill another, according to the commission received from their Maker. What sinner can hope to escape unpunished, when every creature of God is ready to be an avenger of evil? The beasts of the field were made to serve us; we, to serve our Creator. When we forsake our homage to him that made us, it is no marvel, if the beasts forget their duty to us, and deal with us, not as masters, but as rebels.

When a holy man buys so dearly such a slight frailty, of a credulous mistaking, what shall become of our heinous and presumptuous sins?

I cannot think but this prophet died in the favor of God, though by the teeth of the lion. His life was forfeited for example; his soul was safe: yea, his very carcass was left, though torn, yet fair after those deadly grasps; as if God had said, 'I will only take thy breath from thee, as the penalty of thy disobedience. A lion shall do that, which an apoplexy or fever might do. I owe thee no further revenge, than may be satisfied with thy blood.' Violent events do not always argue the anger of God. Even death itself is, to his servants, a fatherly castigation.

But oh, the unsearchable ways of the Almighty! the man of God sins, and dies speedily; the lying prophet, that seduced him, survives: yea, wicked Jeroboam enjoys his idolatry, and treads on the grave of his reprover. There is neither favor in the delay of stripes, nor displeasure in the haste: rather, whom God loves, he chastises, as sharply, so speedily, while the rest prosper to condemnation. Even the rod of a loving father may draw blood. How much happier is it for us, that we die now, to live for ever, than that we live awhile to die ever!

Had this lion set on the prophet for hunger, why did he not devour, as well as kill him? Why did he not rather kill the beast, than the man? since we know the nature of the lion such, that he is not wont to assail man, save in the extreme want of other prey. Certainly, the same power, that employed those fangs, restrained them; that the world might see, it was not appetite, that provoked the beast to this violence, but the overruling command of God. Even so, O Lord, thy powerful hand is over that roaring lion, that goes about continually, seeking whom he may devour. Thine hand withholds him, that, though he may shed the blood of thine elect, yet he cannot hurt their souls; and, while he doth those things which thou permittest, and orderest to thy just ends, yet he cannot do lesser things, which he desireth, and thou permittest not.

The fierce beast stands by the carcass; as to avow his own act and to tell who sent him, so to preserve that body which he hath slain. Oh wonderful work of God! the executioner is turned guardian; and, as the officer of the Highest, commands all other creatures to stand aloof from his charge; and commands the fearful ass, that brought this burden thither, not to stir thence, but stand ready pressed, to re-carry it to the sepulchre: and now, when he hath sufficiently witnessed to all passengers, that this act was not done on his own hunger, but on the quarrel of his Maker, he delivers up his charge to that old prophet, who was no less guilty of this blood than himself.

This old seducer hath so much truth, as both to give a right commentary on God's intention in this act for the

terror of the disobedient, and to give his voice to the certainty of that future judgment which his late guest had threatened to Israel. Sometimes it pleaseth the wisdom of God, to express and justify himself, even by the tongues of faulty instruments. Withal, he hath so much faith and courage, as to fetch that carcass from the lion; so much pity and compassion, as to weep for the man of God, to inter him in his own sepulchre; so much love, as to wish himself joined in death to that body, which he had hastened unto death. It is hard to find a man absolutely wicked. Some grace will bewray itself, in the most forsaken breasts.

It is a cruel courtesy, to kill a man, and then to help him to his grave; to betray a man with our breath, and then to bedew him with our tears. The prophet had needed no such friend, if he had not met with such an enemy. 'The mercies of the wicked are cruel.'—1 Kings xiii.

JEROBOAM'S WIFE.

It is no measuring of God's favor, by the line of outward welfare. Jeroboam, the idolatrous usurper of Israel, prospers better, than the true heirs of David. He lives to see three successions in the throne of Judah. Thus the ivy lives, when the oak is dead.

Yet could not that misgotten crown of his keep his head always from aching: he hath his crosses too. God whips sometimes more than his own: his enemies smart from him, as well as his children; his children in love, his enemies in judgment. Not simply the rod argues love, but the temper of the hand that wields it, and the back that feels it.

First, Jeroboam's hand was stricken; now, his son. Abijah the eldest, the best son of Jeroboam, is smitten with sickness. As children are but the pieces of their parents in another skin, so parents are no less stricken in their children, than in their natural limbs. Jeroboam doth not more feel his arm, than his son. Not wicked men only, but beasts may have natural affections. It is no thank to any creature, to love his own.

Nature wrought in Jeroboam, not grace. He is enough

troubled, with his son's disease; no whit bettered. I would have heard him say; 'God follows me with his afflictions. It is for mine impiety. What other measure can I expect from his justice? While mine idols stand, how can I look that my house should prosper? I will turn from my wickedness; O God, turn thou from thy wrath.'

These thoughts were too good for that obdured heart. His son is sick, he is sorrowful; but as an amazed man seeks to go forth at the wrong door, his distraction sends him to a false help. He thinks not of God; he thinks of his prophet: he thinks of the prophet, that had foretold him he should be a king; he thinks not of the God of that prophet, who made him a king. It is the property of a carnal heart, to confine both his obligations and his hopes to the means, neglecting the Author of good. Vain is the respect that is given to the servant, where the Master is contemned.

Extremity draws Jeroboam's thoughts to the prophet; whom else he had not cared to remember. The king of Israel had divines enough of his own; else he must needs have thought them miserable gods, that were not worth a prophet: and besides, there was an old prophet (if he yet survived) dwelling within the smoke of his palace, whose visions had been too well approved: why should Jeroboam send so far to an Abijah? Certainly, his heart despised those base priests of his high places; neither could he trust, either to the gods or the clergy of his own making. His conscience rests on the fidelity of that man, whose doctrine he had forsaken. How did this idolater strive against his own heart, while he inwardly despised those, whom he professed to honor; and inwardly honored them, whom he professed to despise! Wicked breasts are false to themselves; neither trusting to their own choice, nor making choice of that which they may dare to trust. They will set a good face on their secretly unpleasing sins; and would rather be self-condemned, than wise and penitent.

As for that old seer, it is like Jeroboam knew his skill, but doubted of his sincerity. That man was too much his neighbor to be good. Abijah's truth had been tried in a

case of his own: he, whose word was found just in the prediction of his kingdom, was well worthy of credit in the news of his son. Experience is a great encouragement of our trust. It is a good matter to be faithful: this loadstone of our fidelity shall draw to us even hearts of iron, and hold them to our reliance; as contrarily, deceit doth both argue and make a bankrupt. Who can trust, where he is disappointed? O God, so oft, so ever, have we found thee true in all thy promises, in all thy performances, that if we do not seek thee, if we do not trust thee in the sequel, we are worthy of our loss, worthy of thy desertions.

Yet I do not see, that Jeroboam sends to the prophet, for his aid, but for intelligence. Curiosity is guilty of this message, and not devotion. He calls not for the prayers, not for the benediction of that holy man, but for mere information of the event. He well saw what the prayers of a prophet could do. That, which cured his hand, might it not have cured his son? Yet he, that said to a man of God, 'Entreat the face of the Lord thy God, that he may restore my hand,' says not now in his message to Abijah, 'Entreat thy God to restore my son.' Sin makes such a strangeness betwixt God and man, that the guilty heart either thinks not of suing to God, or fears it. What a poor contentment it was to foreknow that evil, which he could not avoid, and whose notice could but hasten his misery! Yet, thus fond is our restless curiosity, that it seeks ease, in the drawing on of torment. He is worthy of sorrow, that will not stay till it comes to him, but goes to fetch it.

Whom doth Jeroboam send on this message, but his wife; and how, but disguised! Why her, and why thus? Neither durst he trust this errand with another, nor with her in her own form. It was a secret, that Jeroboam sends to a prophet of God: none might know it, but his own bosom, and she that lay in it. If this had been noised in Israel, the example had been dangerous. Who would not have said, 'The king is glad to leave his counterfeit deities, and seek to the true: why should we adhere to them, whom he forsakes?'

As the message must not be known to the people, so

she that bears it must not be known to the prophet; her name, her habit, must be changed; she must put off her robes, and put on a russet coat; she must put off the queen, and put on the peasant; instead of her sceptre, she must take up a basket, and go a masked pilgrimage to Shiloh. Oh the fondness of vain men, that think to juggle with the Almighty, and to hide their councils from that all-seeing eye! If this change of habit were necessary at Bethel, yet what needs it at Shiloh? Though she would hide her face from her subjects, yet why should she not pull off her muffler, and show herself to the prophet? Certainly, what policy began, guiltiness must continue. Well might she think, 'There can be no good answer expected by the wife of Jeroboam. My presence will do no less, than solicit a reproof. No prophet can speak well, to the consort of a founder of idolatry. I may perhaps hear good, as another; though, as myself, I can look for nothing, but tidings of evil.' Wicked hearts know they deserve ill at God's hands; and therefore they do all they can, to avoid the eyes of his displeased justice; and if they cannot do it by colors of dissimulation, they will do it by imploration of shelter: they shall say to the rocks, 'Fall on us, and cover us.'

But oh the gross folly mixed with the craft of wickedness! Could Jeroboam think that the prophet could know the event of his son's disease, and did he think that he could not know the disguise of his wife? The one was present, the other future; this was but wrapped in a clout, that event was wrapped up in the council of God: yet this politic head presumes, that the greater shall be revealed, where the lesser shall be hid. There was never wicked man, that was not infatuate; and in nothing more, than in those things wherein he hoped most to transcend the reach of others.

Ahijah, shunning the iniquity of the times, was retired to a solitary corner of Shiloh. No place could be too private for an honest prophet, in so extreme depravedness: yet even there doth the king of Israel take notice of his reclusion; and sends his wife to that poor cell, laden with presents; that dissembled their bearer. Had she

offered jewels or gold, her greatness had been suspected: now she brings loaves, and cracknels, and honey, her hand answers her back. She gives as she seems, not as she is. Something she must give, even when she acts the poorest client.

The prophets of God were not wont to have empty visitations. They, who hated bribes, yet refused not tokens of gratitude. Yea, the God of heaven, who neither needs our goods nor is capable of our gratifications, yet would have no man to come to him giftless. Wo to those sacrilegious hands, that, instead of bringing to the prophets, carry from them!

Jeroboam was a bad man; yet, as he had a towardly son, so he had an obedient wife; else she had not wanted excuses, to turn off both the journey and the disguise. Against the disguise, she had pleaded the unbeseemingness for her person and state; against the journey, the perils of so long and solitary a walk. Perhaps a lion might be in the way; the lion that tore the prophet in pieces: perhaps, robbers: or, if not they, perhaps her chastity might be in danger; an unguarded solitariness in the weaker sex, might be a provocation to some forced uncleanness. She cast off all these shifting projections of fear. According to the will of her husband, she changes her raiment; she sets on the journey, and overcomes it.

What needed this disguise to an old prophet, whose dim eyes were set with age? All clothes, all faces, were alike to a blind seer. The visions of Abijah were inward; neither was his bodily sight more dusky, than the eyes of his mind were clear and piercing. It was not the common light of men whereby he saw, but divine illumination. Things absent, things future, were no less obvious to those spiritual beams, than present things are to us. Ere the quick eyes of that great lady can discern him, he hath espied her; and as soon as he hears the sound of her feet, she hears from him the sound of her name; 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam.' How God laughs in heaven, at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians; and, when they think themselves most sure, shames

them with a detection, with a defeat! What unwariness is in you, foolish hypocrites to hope they can dance in a net spun over Heaven!

Never before was this queen troubled, to hear of herself: now, she is. Her very name strikes her with astonishment, and prepares her for the assured horror of following judgments. 'I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.'

Could this lady less wonder at the mercy of this style of God, than tremble at the sequel of his justice? Lo, Israel hath forsaken God; yet God still owns Israel: Israel hath gone a whoring; yet God hath not divorced him. O the infinite goodness of our long-suffering God, whom our foulest sins cannot rob of his compassions!

By how much dearer Israel was to God, so much more odious is Jeroboam, that hath marred Israel. Terrible is that vengeance, which God thunders against him by his prophet; whose passionate message upbraids him with his promotions, chargeth him with his sins, and lastly denounceth his judgments. No mouth was fitter, to cast this royalty in the teeth of Jeroboam, than that by which it was first foretold, forepromised. Every circumstance of the advancement aggravates the sin. "I exalted thee:' thou couldest not rise to honor alone. 'I exalted thee, from among the people;' not from the peers: thy rank was but common, before this rise. 'I exalted thee, from among the people, to be a prince:' subordinate height was not enough for thee: no seat would serve thee, but a throne. 'Yea, to be a prince of my people Israel:' no nation was for thee, but my chosen one; none, but my royal inheritance. Neither did I raise thee into a vacant throne; so forlorn and forsaken principality might be thankless; but 'I rent the kingdom away from another, for thy sake;' yea, from what other, but the grandchild of David? Out of his hands did I wrest the sceptre, to give it into thine.' Oh what high favors doth God sometimes cast away, on unworthy subjects! How do his abused bounties double both their sin and judgment! The sins of this prince were no less eminent, than his

obligations; therefore his judgments shall be no less eminent, than his sins.

How bitterly doth God express that, which shall be more bitter in the execution! 'Behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam, every male, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone: him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city, shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field, shall the fowls of the air eat.'

Oh heavy load, that this disguised princess must carry to her husband! But because these evils, though grievous, yet might be remote; therefore, for a present handsel of vengeance, she is dismissed with the sad tidings of the death of her son; 'When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.' It is heavy news for a mother, that she must lose her son; but worse yet, that she may not see him. In these cases of our final departures, our presence gives some mitigation to our grief. Might she but have closed the eyes, and have received the last breath of her dying son, the loss had been more tolerable. I know not how our personal farewell eases our heart, even while it increases our passion. But now, she shall no more see, nor be seen of her Abijah: she shall no sooner be in the city, than he shall be out of the world. Yet, more to perfect her sorrow, she hears, that in him alone there is found some good; the rest of her issue are graceless: she must lose the good, and hold the graceless: he shall die to afflict her; they shall live to afflict her.

Yet, what a mixture is here of severity and favor, in one act; favor to the son, severity to the father: severity to the father, that he must lose such a son; favor to the son, that he shall be taken from such a father! Jeroboam is wicked, therefore he shall not enjoy an Abijah; Abijah hath some good things, therefore he shall be removed from the danger of the depravation of Jeroboam. Sometimes God strikes in favor, but more often forbears out of severity. The best are fittest for heaven; the earth is fittest for the worst: this is the region of sin and misery;

that, of immortality. It is no argument of disfavor, to be taken early from a well-led life; as not of approbation, to age in sin.

As the soul of Abijah is favored in the removal, so is his body with a burial. He shall have alone, both tears and tomb: all the rest of his brethren shall have no grave, but dogs and fowls; no sorrow, but for their life. Though the carcass be insensible of any position, yet honest sepulture is a blessing. It is fit the body should be duly respected on earth, whose soul is glorious in heaven.—1 Kings xiv.

ASA.

The two houses of Judah and Israel grow up now together, in an ambitious rivalry. This splitted plant branches out so severally, as if it had forgotten, that ever it was joined in the root.

The throne of David oft changeth the possessors; and more complaineth of their iniquity, than their remove.

Abijam inherits the sins of his father Rehoboam, no less than his crown; and so spends his three years, as if he had been no whit a kin to his grandfather's virtues. It is no news, that grace is not traduced, while vice is. Therefore is his reign short, because it was wicked.

It was a sad case, when both the kings of Judah and Israel, though enemies, yet conspired in sin. Rehoboam, like his father Solomon, began graciously, but fell to idolatry. As he followed his father, so his son, so his people, followed him. Oh, what a face of a church was here, when Israel worshipped Jeroboam's calves; when Judah built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree! On both hands, God is forsaken, his temple neglected, his worship adulterate; and this, not for some short brunt, but during the succession of two kings: for, after the first three years, Rehoboam changed his father's religion (as his shields) from gold to brass; the rest of his seventeen years were led in impiety. His son Abijam trod in the same miry steps, and Judah with them both. If there were any (doubtless there were some) faithful hearts, yet remaining in both kingdoms, during these heavy times, what a corrosive it

must needs have been to them, to see so deplored and miserable a deprivation!

There was no visible church on earth, but here; and this, what a one! O God, how low dost thou sometimes suffer thine own flock to be driven! What woful wanes and eclipses hast thou ordained for this heavenly body! Yet at last, an Asa shall arise from the loins, from the grave, of Abijam. He shall revive David, and reform Judah. The gloomy times of corruption shall not last always. The light of truth and peace shall at length break out, and bless the sad hearts of the righteous.

It is a wonder how Asa should be good, of the seed of Abijam, of the soil of Maachah; both wicked, both idolatrous. God would have us see, that grace is from heaven; neither needs the help of these earthly conveyances Should not the children of good parents sometimes be evil, and the children of evil parents good, virtue would seem natural, and the giver would lose his thanks. Thus we have seen a fair flower spring out of dung, and a well-fruited tree rise out of a sour stock. Education hath no less power to corrupt, than nature: it is therefore the just praise of Asa, that, being trained up under an idolatrous Maachah, he maintained his piety; as contrarily, it is a shame for those, that have been bred up in the precepts and examples of virtue and godliness, to fall off to lewdness or superstition.

There are four principal monuments of Asa's virtue, as so many rich stones in his diadem.

He took away sodomy and idols out of Judah. Who cannot wonder more, that he found them there, than that he removed them? What a strange incongruity is this: Sodom, in Jerusalem! Idols, in Judah! Surely, debauched profession proves desperate. Admit the idols; ye cannot doubt of the sodomy. If they 'have changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things,' it is no marvel, if God 'give them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies, between themselves.' If they 'changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,

who is blessed for ever,' no marvel, if God 'give them up to vile affections, to change the natural use, into that which is against nature; burning in lust one towards another, men with men working that which is unseemly.' Contrarily, admit the sodomy, ye cannot doubt of the idols. Unnatural beastliness in manners is punished justly, with a sottish dotage in religion; bodily pollution, with spiritual. How should the soul care to be chaste, that keeps a stew in the body! Asa begins with the banishment of both; scouring Judah of this double uncleanness. In vain should he have hoped to restore God to his kingdom, while these abominations inhabited it. It is justly the main care of worthy and religious princes, to clear their coasts of the foulest sins. Oh the impartial zeal of Asa! There were idols, that challenged a prerogative of favor; the idols that his father had made: all these he defaces. The name of a father cannot protect an idol. The duty to his parent cannot win him to a liking, to a forbearance, of his misdevotion. Yea, so much the more doth the heart of Asa rise against these puppets, for that they were the sin, the shame, of his father. Did there want, think we, some courtier of his father's retinue, to say, 'Sir, favor the memory of him that begot you; you cannot demolish these statues, without the dishonor of the erector: hide your dislike at the least; it will be your glory to lay your finger on this blot of your father's reputation: if you list not to allow his act, yet wink at it?' The godly zeal of Asa turns the deaf ear to these monitors; and lets them see, that he doth not more honor a father, than hate an idol. No dearness of person should take off the edge of our detestation of the sin. Nature is worthy of forgetfulness and contempt, in opposition to the God of nature.

On the same ground as he removed the idols of his father Abijam, so for idols he removed his grandmother Maachah: she would not be removed from her obscene idols; she is therefore removed from the station of her honor. That princess had aged, both in her regency and superstition. Under her rod, was Asa brought up; and schooled, in the rudiments of her idolatry. Whom she

could not infect, she hoped to overawe; to us, if Asa will not follow her gods, yet she presumes that she may retain her own. Doubtless, no means were neglected for her reclamation; none would prevail. Religious Asa gathers up himself; and begins to remember, that he is a king, though a son; that she, though a mother, yet is a subject; that her eminence could not but countenance idolatry; that her greatness suppressed religion, which he should in vain hope to reform, while her superstition swayed: forgetting therefore the challenges of nature, the awe of infancy, the custom of reverence, he strips her of that command, which he saw prejudicial to his Maker. All respects of flesh and blood must be trampled on, for God. Could that long-settled idolatry want abettors? Questionless, some or other would say, 'This was the religion of your father Abijam; this, of your grandfather Rehoboam; this, of the latter days of your wise and great-grandfather Solomon; this, of your grandmother Maachah; this, of your great-grandmother Naamah; why should it not be yours? Why should you suspect either the wisdom, or piety, or salvation, of so many predecessors?' Good Asa had learned to contemn prescription against a direct law. He had the grace to know, it was no measuring truth by so modern antiquity. His eyes, scorning to look so low, raise up themselves to the uncorrupt times of Solomon, to David, to Samuel, to the Judges, to Joshua, to Moses, to the Patriarchs, to Noah, to the religious founders of the first world, to the first father of mankind, to Paradise, to Heaven. In comparison of these, Maachah's god cannot overlook yesterday. The ancientest error is but a novice to truth; and, if never any example could be pleaded for purity of religion, it is enough that the precept is express. He knew what God said in Sinai, and wrote in the tables; 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor any similitude. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.' If all the world had been an idolater, ever since that word was given, he knew how little that precedent could avail for disobedience. Practice must be corrected by law, and not the law yield to practice. Maachah therefore goes down from her seat;

her idols from their grove: she to retiredness; they to the fire, and from thence to the water. Woful deities! that could both burn and drown.

Neither did the zeal of Asa more magnify itself, in these privative acts of weeding out the corruptions of religion, than in the positive acts of a holy plantation. In the falling of those idolatrous shrines, the temple of God florishes. That doth he furnish, with those sacred treasures, which were dedicated by himself, by his progenitors. Like the true son of David, he would not serve God cost-free. Rehoboam turned Solomon's gold into brass; Asa turns Rehoboam's brass into gold. Some of these vessels, it seems, Abijam, Asa's father, had dedicated to God; but, after his vow, inquired, yea, withheld them: Asa, like a good son, pays his father's debts, and his own. It is a good sign of a well-meant devotion, when we can abide it chargeable; as contrarily, in the affairs of God, a niggardly hand argues a cold and hollow heart.

All these were noble and excellent acts; the extirpation of sodomy; the demolition of idols; the removal of Maachah; the bounteous contribution to the temple: but that, which gives true life unto all these, is a sound root; 'Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord, all his days.' No less laudable works than these have proceeded from hypocrisy; which, while they have carried away applause from men, have lost their thanks with God. All Asa's gold was but dross, to his pure intentions.

But oh, what great and many infirmities may consist with uprightness! What allays of imperfection will there be found, in the most refined soul! Four no small faults are found in true-hearted Asa.

First, the high places stood still, unremoved. What high places? There were some dedicated to the worship of false gods; these, Asa took away: there were some misdevoted to the worship of the true God; these, he lets stand. There was gross idolatry in the former; there was a weak will-worship in the latter. While he opposes impiety, he winks at mistakings. Yet even the variety of altars was forbidden, by an express charge from God, who had confined his service to the temple. With one breath, doth God report both these; 'The high places

were not removed; yet, nevertheless, Asa's heart was perfect.' God will not see weaknesses, where he sees truth. How pleasing a thing is sincerity, that, in favor thereof, the mercy of our just God digests many an error! O God, let our hearts go upright, though our feet slide: the fall cannot, through thy grace, be deadly, however it may shame or pain us.

Besides, to confront his rival of Israel, Baasha, this religious king of Judah fetches in Benhadad, the king of Syria, into God's inheritance, on too dear a rate; the breach of his league, the expilation of the temple. All the wealth wherewith Asa had endowed the house of the Lord, was little enough to hire an Edomite, to betray his fidelity and to invade Israel. Leagues may be made with infidels; not at such a price, on such terms. There can be no warrant, for a wilful subornation of perfidiousness. In these cases of outward things, the mercy of God dispenseth with our true necessities, not with the affected. O Asa, where was thy piety, while thou robbest God, to corrupt an infidel for the slaughter of Israelites? O princes, where is your piety, while you hire Turks to the slaughter of Christians? to the spoil of God's church?

Yet, which was worse, Asa doth not only employ the Syrian, but relies on him; relies not on God. A confidence less sinful cost his grandfather David dear. And when Hanani, God's seer, the herald of heaven, came to denounce war against him for these sins, Asa, instead of penitence, breaks into choler: fury sparkles in those eyes, which should have gushed out with water: those lips, that should have called for mercy, command revenge. How ill do these two agree, the heart of David, the tongue of Jeroboam! That holy grandfather of his would not have done so: when God's messenger reproved him for sin, he condemned it, and himself for it: I see his tears; I do not hear his threats. It ill becomes a faithful heart to rage, where it should sorrow; and, instead of submission, to persecute. Sometimes, no difference appears, betwixt a son of David and the son of Nebat. Any man may do ill, but to defend it, to outface it, is for rebels; yet even upright Asa imprisons the prophet, and crushes his gainsayers. It were pity, that the best man should

be judged by every of his actions, and not by all. The course of our life must either allow or condemn us; not these sudden eruptions.

As the life, so the death-bed of Asa wanted not infirmities. Long and prosperous had his reign been: now, after forty years' health and happiness, he, that imprisoned the prophet, is imprisoned in his bed. There is more pain in those fetters which God put on Asa, than those which Asa puts on Hanani. And now, behold he, that in his war seeks to Benhadad, not to God, in his sickness seeks not to God, but to physicians. We cannot easily put on God a greater wrong, than the alienation of our trust. Earthly means are for use, not for confidence. We may, we must employ them; we may not rely on them. Well may God challenge our trust, as his peculiar; which, if we cast on any creature, we deify it. Whence have herbs, and drugs, and physicians, their being and efficacy, but from that divine hand? No marvel, then, if Asa's gout struck to his heart, and his feet carried him to his grave; since his heart was miscarried for the cure of his feet, to an injurious misconfidence in the means, with neglect of his Maker.—1 Kings xv. 2 Chron. xiv. xv. xvi.

ELIJAH WITH THE SAREPTAN.

Who should be matched with Moses in the hill of Tabor, but Elijah? Surely next after Moses, there was never any prophet of the Old Testament more glorious than he.

None more glorious; none more obscure. The other prophets are not mentioned without the name of their parent; for the mutual honor both of the father and the son; Elijah, as if he had been a son of the earth, comes forth with the bare mention of the place of his birth. Meanness of descent is no block in God's way, to the most honorable vocations. It matters not whose son he be, whom God will grace with his service. In the greatest honors that human nature is capable of, God forgets our parents: as, when we shall be raised up to a glorious life, there shall be no respect had to the loins whence we came, so it is proportionally in these spiritual advancements.

These times were fit for an Elijah: an Elijah was fit for

them. The eminentest prophet is reserved for the corruptest age. Israel had never such a king as Ahab, for impiety; never so miraculous a prophet as Elijah: this Elijah is addressed to this Ahab. The God of spirits knows how to proportion men to the occasions; and to raise up to himself such witnesses, as may be most able to convince the world: a mild Moses was for the low estate of afflicted Israel; mild of spirit, but mighty in wonders; mild of spirit, because he had to do with a persecuted, and yet a techy and perverse people; mighty in wonders, because he had to do with a Pharaoh: a grave and holy Samuel was for the quiet consistence of Israel: a fiery-spirited Elijah was for the desperatest declination of Israel: and if, in the late times of the depraved condition of his church, God have raised up some spirits that have been more warm and stirring than those of common mould, we cannot censure the choice, when we see the service.

The first word, that we hear from Elijah, is an oath, and a threat to Ahab, to Israel; 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' He comes in like a tempest, who went out in a whirlwind. Doubtless, he had spoken fair and peaceable invitations to Israel, though we hear them not: this was but the storm, which followed his repulse, their obstinacy. After many solicitations and warnings, Israel is stricken by the same tongue that had prayed for it.

Elijah dares avouch these judgments to their head, to Ahab. I do not so much wonder at the boldness of Elijah, as at his power; yea, who sees his power, can no whit wonder at his boldness. How could he be but bold to the face of a man, who was thus powerful with God!

As if God had lent him the keys of heaven, to shut it up and open it at pleasure, he can say, 'There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' O God, how far it hath pleased to communicate thyself to a weak man! What angel could ever say thus? Thy hand, O Lord, is not shortened. Why art thou not thus marvellous, in the ministers of thy Gospel? Is it, for that their miracles were ours? Is it, for that thou wouldest have us live by faith, not by sense? Is it, for that our task is

spiritual, and therefore more abstracted from bodily helps? We cannot command the sun with Joshua, nor the thunder with Samuel, nor the rain with Elijah: it shall content us, if we can fix the Sun of Righteousness in the soul; if we can thunder out the judgments of God against sin; if we can water the earthen hearts of men, with the former and latter rain of heavenly doctrine.

Elijah's mantle cannot make him forget his flesh. While he knows himself a prophet, he remembers to be a man; he doth not therefore arrogate his power as his own, but publisheth it as his Master's. This restraint must be according to his word; and that word was from a higher mouth than his. He spake from him, by whom he sware, whose word was sure as his life; and therefore he durst say, 'As the Lord liveth, there shall be no rain.' Man only can denounce, what God will execute; which, when it is once revealed, can no more fail, than the Almighty himself.

He, that had this interest and power in heaven, what needed he flee from an earthly pursuit? Could his prayers restrain the clouds, and not hold the hands of flesh and blood? Yet behold, Elijah must flee from Ahab, and hide him by the brook Cherith. The wisdom of God doth not think fit, so to make a beaten path of miracles, as that he will not walk beside it. He will have our own endeavors concur to our preservation. Elijah wanted neither courage of heart nor strength of hand, and yet he must trust to his feet for safety. How much more lawful is it for our impotence, to flee from persecution! Even that God sends him to hide his head, who could as easily have protected as nourished him. He, that wilfully stands still to catch dangers, tempteth God, instead of trusting him.

The prophet must be gone; not without order taken for his purveyance. Oh the strange caterers for Elijah; 'I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.' I know not whether had been more miraculous, to preserve him without meat, or to provide meat by such mouths. The raven, a devouring and ravenous fowl, that uses to snatch away meat from others, brings it to him. He, that could have fed Elijah by angels, will feed him by ravens. There was then in Israel an hospitable Obadiah, that kept a secret table in two several caves, for a hundred prophets

of God. There were seven thousand faithful Israelites, in spite of the devil, who had never bowed knee to Baal. Doubtless, any of these would have had a trencher ready for Elijah; and have thought himself happy, to have defrauded his own maw, for so noble a prophet. God rather chooses, to make use of the most unlikely fowls of the air, than their bounty; that he might give, both to his prophet and us, a pregnant proof of his absolute command over all his creatures, and win our trust in all extremities. Who can make question of the provisions of God, when he sees the very ravens shall forget their own hunger, and purvey for Elijah? O God, thou, that providest meat for the fowls of the air, wilt make the fowls of the air provide meat for man, rather than this dependance on thee shall be disappointed. Oh let not our faith be wanting to thee; thy care can never be wanting to us.

Elijah might have lived for the time, with bread and water; neither had his fare been worse, than his fellows in the caves of Obadiah: but the munificence of God will have his meals better furnished: the ravens shall bring him both bread and flesh, twice in the day.

It is not for a persecuted prophet, to long after delicacies. God gives order for competency; not for wantonness. Not out of the dainty compositions in Jezebel's kitchen, not out of the pleasant wines in her cellar, would God provide for Elijah; but the ravens shall bring him plain and homely victuals, and the river shall afford him drink. If we have wherewith to sustain nature, though not to pamper it, we owe thanks to the Giver. Those of God's family may not be curious; not disdainful. Ill doth it become a servant of the Highest, to be a slave to his palate. Doubtless, one bit from the mouth of the raven was more pleasing to Elijah, than a whole tablefull of Ahab. Nothing is more comfortable to God's children, than to see sensible demonstrations of the divine care and providence.

The brook Cherith cannot last always. That stream shall not, for Elijah's sake, be exempted from the universal exsiccation; yea, the prophet himself feels the smart of this drought, which he had denounced. It is no unusual thing with God, to suffer his own dear children to

be inwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. He makes difference, in the use and issue of their stripes; not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weeds, but to a better purpose.

When the brook fails, God hath a Zarephath for Elijah: instead of the ravens, a widow shall there feed him; yea, herself by him. Who can enough wonder, at the pitch of this selective providence of the Almighty! Zarephath was a town of Sidon, and therefore without the pale of the church. Poverty was the best of this widow: she was a pagan, by birth; heathenishly superstitious, by institution. 'Many widows were in Israel, in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land, but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto this Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.' He, that first fed the prophet by the mouth of unclean fowls, will now feed him by the hand of a heathenish hostess. His only command sanctifies those creatures, which, by a general charge, were legally impure.

There were other birds, besides ravens; other widows, besides this Sareptan: none but the ravens, none but the Sareptan, shall nourish Elijah. God's choice is not led in the string of human reasons. His holy will is the guide, and the ground, of all his elections. 'It is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but in God that shows mercy.'

The prophet follows the call of his God. The same hand, that brought him to the gate of Sarepta, led also this poor widow out of her doors. She shall then go to seek her sticks, when she shall be found of Elijah. She thought of her hearth; she thought not of a prophet: when the man of God calls to her, 'Fetch me a little water, I pray thee, in a vessel, that I may drink.' It was no easy suit, in so droughty a season; and yet, at the first sight, the prophet dares second it with a greater; 'Bring me a morsel of bread in thine hand.' That long drought had made every drop, every crumb, precious; yet the prophet is emboldened, by the charge of God, to call for both water and bread. He had found the ravens so officious, that he cannot make doubt of the Sareptan.

She sticks not at the water; she would not stick at the bread, if necessity had not pressed her; 'As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it, for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.'

If she knew not the man, how did she know his God? And if she knew not the God of Elijah, how did she swear by him? Certainly, though she were without the bounds of Israel, yet she was within the borders. So much she had gained by her neighborhood, to know an Israelite, a prophet, by his habit; to know the only living God was the God of the prophet, the God of Israel: and if this had not been, yet it is no marvel, if the widow knew Elijah, since the ravens knew him.

It was high time, for the prophet to visit the Sareptan. Poor soul! she was now making her last meal: after one mean morsel, she was yielding herself over to death. How opportunely hath God provided succors to our distresses! It is his glory, to help at a pinch; to begin, where we have given over: that our relief might be so much the more welcome, by how much it is less looked for.

But oh, what a trial is this of the faith of a weak proselyte, if she were so much! 'Fear not; go, do as thou hast said, but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it to me, and after make for thee, and thy son: for, thus saith the God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, till the day that God send rain on the earth.' She must go spend on a stranger part of that little she hath, in hope of more, which she hath not, which she may have. She must part with her present food, which she saw, in trust of future, which she could not see. She must rob her sense, in the exercise of her belief; and shorten her life in being, on the hope of a protraction of it in promise. She must believe God will miraculously increase, what she hath yielded to consume. She must first feed the stranger, with her last victuals; and then after, herself and her son.

Some sharp dame would have taken up the prophet; and have sent him away, with an angry repulse: 'Bold Israelite; there is no reason in this request. Wert thou

a friend or a brother, with what face couldest thou require, to pull my last bit out of my mouth? Had I superfluity of provision, thou mightest hope for this effect of my charity: now, that I have but one morsel for myself and my son, this is an injurious importunity. What can induce thee to think thy life, an unknown traveller, should be more dear to me than my son's, than my own? How uncivil is this motion, that I should first make provision for thee, in this dying extremity! It had been too much, to have begged my last scraps. Thou tellest me the meal shall not waste, nor the oil fail; how shall I believe thee? Let me see that done, before thou eatest. In vain should I challenge thee, when the remainder of my poor store is consumed. If thou canst so easily multiply victuals, how is it that thou wantest? Do that beforehand, which thou promisest shall be afterwards performed, there will be no need of my little.'

But this good Sareptan was wrought by God, not to mistrust a prophet. She will do what he bids, and hope for what he promises. She will live by faith, rather than by sense; and give away the present, in the confidence of a future remuneration. First, she bakes Elijah's cake; then, her own: not grudging, to see her last morsels go down another's throat, while herself was famishing. How hard precepts doth God lay, where he intends bounty! Had not God meant her preservation, he had suffered her to eat her last cake alone, without any interpellation: now, the mercy of the Almighty purposing, as well this miraculous favor to her as to his prophet, requires of her this task, which flesh and blood would have thought unreasonable. So we are wont, to put hard questions to those scholars, whom we would promote to higher forms. So in all achievements, the difficulty of the enterprise makes way for the glory of the actor.

Happy was it for this widow, that she did not shut her hand to the man of God; that she was no niggard of her last handfull. Never corn or olive did so increase in growing, as here in consuming. This barrel, this cruse of hers, had no bottom: 'the barrel of meal wasted not; the cruse of oil failed not.' Behold, not getting, not saving, is the way to abundance, but giving. The mercy

of God crowns our beneficence, with the blessing of store. Who can fear want, by a merciful liberality; when he sees the Sareptan had famished, if she had not given, and by giving abounded? With what thankful devotion must this woman every day needs look on her barrel and cruse, wherein she saw the mercy of God renewed to her continually! Doubtless, her soul was no less fed by faith, than her body with this supernatural provision. How welcome a guest must Elijah needs be to this widow, that gave her life and her son's to her, for his board! yea, that, in woful famine, gave her and her son their board, for his house-room!

The dearth thus overcome, the mother looks hopefully on her only son; promising herself much joy, in his life and prosperity; when an unexpected sickness surpriseth him, and doth that which the famine but threatened. When can we hold ourselves secure from evils? No sooner is one of these sergeants compounded withal, than we are arrested by another.

How ready we are to mistake the grounds of our afflictions, and to cast them on false causes! The passionate mother cannot find whither to impute the death of her son, but to the presence of Elijah; to whom she comes, distracted with perplexity; not without an unkind challenge of him, from whom she had received, both that life she had lost and that she had; 'What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come to me, to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?' As if her son could not have died, if Elijah had not been her guest; whereas her son had died, but for him. Why should she think, that the prophet had saved him from the famine, to kill him with sickness? As if God had not been free in his actions; and must needs strike by the same hands, by which he preserved. She had the grace to know, that her affliction was for her sin; yet was so unwise, to imagine the arrearages of her iniquities had not been called for, if Elijah had not been the remembrancer. He, who had appeased God towards her, is suspected to have incensed him.

This wrongful misconstruction was enough to move any patience. Elijah was of a hot spirit; yet his holiness

kept him from fury. This challenge rather increased the zeal of his prayer, than stirred his choler to the offender. He takes the dead child out of his mother's bosom, and lays him on his own bed, and cries unto the Lord; 'O Lord my God, hast thou brought evil also on the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?' Instead of chiding the Sareptan, out of the fervency of his soul, he humbly expostulates with his God. His only remedy is in his prayer: that, which shut heaven for rain, must open it for life.

Every word enforceth; first, he pleads his interest in God, 'O Lord my God:' then, the quality of the patient; a 'widow,' and therefore, both most distressed with the loss, and most peculiar to the charge of the Almighty: then, his interest, as in God, so in this patient; 'with whom I sojourn;' as if the stroke were given to himself, through her sides: and lastly, the quality of the punishment, 'by slaying her son,' the only comfort of her life: and in all these implying the scandal, that must needs arise from this event, wherever it should be noised, to the name of his God, to his own; when it should be said: 'Lo how Elijah's entertainment is rewarded: surely the prophet is either impotent or unthankful!'

Neither doth his tongue move thus only. Thrice doth he stretch himself on the dead body; as if he could wish, to infuse of his own life into the child; and so often calls to his God, for the restitution of that soul.

What can Elijah ask, to be denied? 'The Lord heard the voice of the prophet; the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.' What miracle is impossible to faithful prayers? There cannot be more difference betwixt Elijah's devotion and ours, than betwixt supernatural and ordinary acts; if he therefore obtained miraculous favors by his prayers, do we doubt of those which are within the sphere of nature and use? What could we want, if we did not slack to ply heaven with our prayers?

Certainly, Elijah had not been premonished of this sudden sickness and death of the child. He, who knew the remote affairs of the world, might not know what God would do within his own roof. The greatest prophet

must content himself, with so much of God's council, as he will please to reveal; and he will sometimes reveal the great secrets and conceal the less, to make good, both his own liberty and man's humiliation.

So much more unexpected as the stroke was, so much more welcome is the cure. How joyfully doth the man of God take the revived child into his arms and present him to his mother! How doth his heart leap within him, at this proof of God's favor to him; mercy, to the widow; power, to the child!

What life and joy did now show itself, in the face of that amazed mother, when she saw again the eyes of her son fixed on hers; when she felt his flesh warm, his motions vital!

Now she can say to Elijah, 'By this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.' Did she not till now know this? Had she not said before, 'What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?' Were not her cruse and her barrel sufficient proofs of his divine commission? Doubtless, what her meal and oil had assured her of, the death of her son made her to doubt; and now, reviving, did reascertain. Even the strongest faith sometimes staggereth, and needeth new acts of heavenly supportation.

The end of miracles is confirmation of truth. It seems had this widow's son continued dead, her belief had been buried in his grave: notwithstanding her meal and her oil, her soul had languished. The mercy of God is fain to provide new helps for our infirmities; and graciously condescends to our own terms, that we may work out our faith and salvation. 1 Kings xvii.

ELIJAH WITH THE BAALITES.

Three years and a half did Israel lie gasping under a parching drought and miserable famine.

No creature was so odious to them, as Elijah; to whom they ascribed all their misery. Methinks, I hear how they rail on and curse the prophet. How much envy must the servants of God undergo for their master! Nothing but the tongue was Elijah's; the hand was God's. The prophet did but say, what God would do: I do not

see them fall out with their sins, that had deserved the judgment; but with the messenger, that denounced it. Baal had no fewer servants, than if there had been both rain and plenty.

Elijah safely spends this storm, under the lee of Sarepta. Some three years hath he lain close in that obscure corner; and lived on the barrel and cruse, which he had multiplied: at last, God calls him forth; 'Go show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.'

No rain must fall, till Elijah were seen of Ahab. He carried away the clouds with him; he must bring them again. The king, the people of Israel, shall be witnesses, that God will make good the word, the oath, of his prophet. Should the rain have fallen in Elijah's absence, who could have known it was by his procurement? God holds the credit of his messengers precious; and neglects nothing that may grace them in the eyes of the world. Not the necessity of seven thousand religious Israelites could crack the word of one Elijah. There is nothing, wherein God is more tender, than in approving the veracity of himself, in his ministers.

Lewd Ahab hath a holy steward. As his name was, so was he, a servant of God, while his master was a slave to Baal. He, that reserved seven thousand in the kingdom of Israel, hath reserved an Obadiah in the court of Israel; and by him, hath reserved them. Neither is it likely, there had been so many free hearts in the country, if religion had not been secretly backed in the court. It is a great happiness, when God gives favor and honor to the virtuous.

Elijah did not lie more close in Sarepta, than Obadiah did in the court. He could not have done so much service to the church, if he had not been as secret as good. Policy and religion do as well together, as they do ill asunder. The dove without the serpent, is easily caught; the serpent without the dove, stings deadly. Religion without policy, is too simple to be safe; policy without religion, is too subtile to be good: their match makes themselves secure, and many happy.

Oh degenerated estate of Israel! Any thing was now lawful there, saving piety. It is well, if God's prophets

can find a hole to hide their heads in. They must needs be hard driven, when fifty of them are fain to crowd together into one cave. There they had both shade and repast. Good Obadiah hazards his own life, to preserve theirs; and spends himself, in that extreme dearth, on their necessary diet. Bread and water was more now, than other while wine and delicacies. Whether shall we wonder more, at the mercy of God in reserving a hundred prophets, or in thus sustaining them being reserved? When did God ever leave his Israel, unfurnished of some prophets? When did he leave his prophets, unprovided of some Obadiah? How worthy art thou, O Lord, to be trusted with thine own charge. While there are men on earth, or birds in the air, or angels in heaven, thy messengers cannot want provision.

Goodness carries away trust, where it cannot have imitation. Ahab divides with Obadiah the survey of the whole land. They two set their own eyes on work, for the search of water, of pasture, to preserve the horses and mules alive.

Oh the poor and vain cares of Ahab! He casts to kill the prophet, to save the cattle; he never seeks to save his own soul, to destroy idolatry: he takes thought for grass, none for mercy. Carnal hearts are ever, either grovelling on the earth, or delving into it; no more regarding God or their souls, than if they either were not, or were worthless.

Elijah hears of the progress; and offers himself to the view of them both. Here was wisdom in this courage: first, he presents himself to Obadiah, ere he will be seen of Ahab; that Ahab might, on the report of so discreet an informer, digest the expectation of his meeting: then he takes the opportunity of Ahab's presence, when he might be sure Jezebel was away.

Obadiah meets the prophet; knows him; and, as if he had seen God in him, falls on his face to him, whom he knew his master persecuted. Though a great peer, he had learned to honor a prophet. No respect was too much, for the president of that sacred college. To the poor boarder of the Sareptan, here was no less, than a prostration; and, 'My lord Elijah,' from the great high steward

of Israel. Those, that are truly gracious, cannot be niggardly of their observances, to the messengers of God.

Elijah receives the reverence; returns a charge; 'Go tell my lord, behold Elijah is here.' Obadiah finds this load too heavy; neither is he more stricken with the boldness, than with the unkindness of this command: boldness, in respect of Elijah; unkindness, in respect of himself. For, thus he thinks, 'If Elijah do come to Ahab, he dies: if he do not come, I die. If it be known that I met him, and brought him not, it is death: if I say that he will come voluntarily, and God shall alter his intentions, it is death. How unhappy a man am I, that must be either Elijah's executioner, or my own! Were Ahab's displeasure but smoking, I might hope to quench it; but now, that the flame of it hath broken forth to the notice, to the search, of all the kingdoms and nations round about, it may consume me; I cannot extinguish it. This message were for an enemy of Elijah; for a client of Baal: as for me, I have well approved my true devotion to God; my love to his prophets. What have I done, that I should be singled out, either to kill Elijah or to be killed for him?' Many a hard plunge must that man needs be driven to, who would hold his conscience, together with the service and favor of a tyrant. It is a happy thing, to serve a just master: there is no danger, no stain, in such obedience.

But, when the prophet binds his resolution with an oath, and clears the heart of Obadiah from all fears, from all suspicions, the good man dares be the messenger of that, which he saw was decreed in heaven.

Doubtless, Ahab startled to hear of Elijah coming to meet him; as one, that did not more hate, than fear the prophet. Well might he think, 'Thus long, thus far, have I sought Elijah. Elijah would not come to seek me, but under a sure guard, and with some strange commission. His coarse mantle hath the advantage of my robe and sceptre. If I can command a piece of the earth, I see he can command heaven.' The edge of his revenge is taken off, with a doubtful expectation of the issue; and now, when Elijah offers himself to the eyes of Ahab, he, who durst not strike, yet durst challenge the prophet; 'Art thou he, that troubleth Israel?' Jeroboam's hand was still

in Ahab's thoughts. He holds it not so safe to smite, as to expostulate. He, that was the head of Israel, speaks out that, which was in the heart of all his people, that Elijah was the cause of all their sorrow. Alas! what hath the righteous prophet done? He taxed their sin, he foretold the judgments; he deserved it not, he inflicted it not: yet he smarts, and they are guilty. As if some fond people should accuse the herald or the trumpet, as the cause of their war; or, as if some ignorant peasant, when he sees his fowls bathing in his pond, should cry out of them as the causes of foul weather.

Oh the heroical spirit of Elijah! He stands alone, amidst all the train of Ahab; and dares not only repel this charge, but retort it; 'I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.' No earthly glory can daunt him, who hath the clear and heartening visions of God.

This holy seer discerns the true cause of our sufferings to be our sins. Foolish men are plagued for their offences; and it is no small part of their plague, that they see it not. The only common disturber of men, families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is sin. There is no such traitor to any state, as the wilfully wicked. The quietest and most plausible offender is secretly seditious, and stirreth quarrels in heaven.

The true messengers of God carry authority, even where they are maligned. Elijah doth at once reprove the king, and require of him the improvement of his power; in gathering all Israel to Carmel; in fetching thither all the prophets of Baal.

Baal was rich in Israel, while God was poor. While God hath but one hundred prophets hid closely in Obadiah's caves, Baal hath eight hundred and fifty: four hundred and fifty dispersed over the villages and towns of Israel; four hundred at the court. God's prophets are glad of bread and water, while the four hundred trencher prophets of Jezebel feed on her dainties: they lurk in caves; while these lord it in the pleasantest groves. Outward prosperity is a false note of truth.

All these, with all Israel, doth Elijah require Ahab *to*

summon unto Carmel. It is in the power of kings, to command the assembly of the prophets. The prophet sues to the prince, for the indiction of this synod. They are injurious to sovereignty, who arrogate this power to none but spiritual hands.

How is it, that Ahab is as ready to perform this charge, as Elijah to move it? I dare answer for his heart, that it was not drawn with love. Was it out of the sense of one judgment, and fear of another? He smarted with the dearth and drought; and well thinks Elijah would not be so round with him for nothing. Was it out of an expectation of some miraculous exploit, which the prophet would do in the sight of all Israel? Or, was it out of the overruling power of the Almighty? 'The heart of kings is in the hands of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleaseth.'

Israel is met together: Elijah rates them; not so much for their superstition, as for their unsettledness and irresolution. One Israelite serves God, another Baal; yea, the same Israelite, perhaps, serves both God and Baal. 'How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.' Nothing is more odious to God, than a profane neutrality, in main oppositions of religion. To go upright in a wrong way is a less eyesore to God, than to halt betwixt right and wrong. The Spirit wisheth, that the Laodicean were 'either hot or cold:' either temper would better be borne, than neither; than both. In reconcilable differences, nothing is more safe, than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but in cases of so necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, he, that is on neither side, is the deadliest enemy to both. Less hateful are they to God that serve him not at all, than they that serve him with a rival.

Whether out of guiltiness, or fear, or uncertainty, Israel is silent; yet, while their mouth was shut, their eyes were open.

It was a fair motion of Elijah, "I am only remaining a prophet of the Lord: Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty. Let them choose one bullock; let me choose another.' Their devotion shall be combined; mine single.

'The God that consumes the sacrifice by fire from heaven, let him be God." Israel cannot but approve it: the prophets of Baal cannot refuse it; they had the appearance of the advantage, in their number, in the favor of king and people.

Oh strange disputation: wherein the argument which must be used is fire; the place whence it must be fetched, heaven; the mood and figure, devotion; the conclusion, death to be overcome!

Had not Elijah, by divine instinct, been assured of the event, he durst not have put religion on such hazard. That God commanded him this trial, who meant confusion to the authors of idolatry, victory to the truth. His terror shall be approved, both by fire and by water: first, by fire; then, by water. There was no less terror in the fire, than mercy in the rain. It was fit they should first be humbled by his terrors, that they might be made capable of his mercy; and by both might be won to repentance. Thus still, the fears of the law make way for the influences of grace; neither do those sweet and heavenly dews descend on the soul, till way be made for them, by the terrible flashes of the law.

Justly doth Elijah urge this trial. God's sacrifices were used to none, but heavenly fires; whereas, the base and earthly religion of the heathen contented itself, with gross and natural flames.

The prophets of Baal durst not, though with faint and guilty hearts, but embrace the condition. They dress their bullock, and lay it ready on the wood; and send out their cries to Baal, from morning until midday; 'O Baal, hear us.' What a yelling was here, of four hundred and fifty throats tearing the skies for an answer! What leaping was here on the altar; as if they would have climbed up to fetch that fire, which would not come down alone! Mount Carmel might give an echo to their voice; heaven gave none. In vain do they roar out, and weary themselves in imploring a dumb and deaf deity.

Grave and austere Elijah holds it not too light, to flout their zealous devotion. He laughs at their tears, and plays on their earnest; 'Cry aloud; for he is a God: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is travelling,

or he is sleeping, and must be awaked.' Scorns and taunts are the best answers, for serious idolatry. Holiness will bear us out, in disdainful scoffs and bitterness, against wilful superstition.

No less in the indignation at these insulting frumps, than zeal of their own safety and reputation, do these idolatrous prophets now rend their throats with inclamatione; and, that they may assure the beholders they were not in jest, they cut and slash themselves with knives and lancets, and solicit the fire with their blood.

How much painfulness there is in misreligion! I do not find, that the true God ever required or accepted the self-tortures of his servants. He loves true inward mortification of our corruptions; he loves the subduing of our spiritual insurrections, by due exercise of severe restraint; he takes no pleasure in our blood, in our carcasses. They mistake God, that they think to please him, by destroying that nature, which he hath made; and measure truth, by rigor of outward extremities. Elijah drew no blood of himself: the priests of Baal did.

How fain would the devil, whom these idolaters adored, have answered the suit of his suppliants! What would that ambitious spirit have given, that, as he was cast down from heaven like lightning, so now he might have fallen down in that form on his altar! God forbids it: all the powers of darkness can no more show one flash of fire in the air, than avoid the unquenchable fire in hell. How easy were it for the power of the Almighty, to cut short all the tyrannical usurpation of that wicked one; if his wisdom and justice did not find the permission thereof useful to his holy purposes.

These idolaters now, towards evening, grew so much more vehement, as they were more hopeless; and at last, when neither their shrieks, nor their wounds, nor their mad motions, could prevail, they sit down hoarse and weary; tormenting themselves afresh with their despairs, and with the fears of bitter success of their adversary: when Elijah calls the people to him (the witnesses of his sincere proceedings), and, taking the opportunity both of the time, the just hour of the evening sacrifice, and of the place, a ruined altar of God now by

him repaired, convinces Israel with his miracle; and more cuts these Baalites with envy, than they had cut themselves with their lancets.

O holy prophet, why didst thou not save this labor? What needed these unseasonable reparations? Was there not an altar, was there not a sacrifice, ready prepared to thy hand? That, which the prophets of Baal had addressed, stood still waiting for that fire from thee which the founders threatened in vain. The stones were not more impure, either for their touch or their intentions; yet, such was thy detestation of idolatry, that thou abhorrest to meddle with aught, which their wickedness had defiled. Even that altar, whose ruins thou didst thus repair, was miserected, though to the name of the true God; yet didst thou find it better to make up the breaches of that altar, which was misconsecrated to the service of thy God, than to make use of that pile, which was idolatrously devoted to a false god. It cannot be but safe, to keep aloof from participation with idolaters; even in those things, which, not only in nature but in use, are unclean.

Elijah lays twelve stones in his repaired altar, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. Alas! ten of these were perverted to Baal. The prophet regards not their present apostasy: he regards the ancient covenant, that was made with their father Israel; he regards their first station, to which he would reduce them. He knew, that the unworthiness of Israel could not make God forgetful: he would, by this monument, put Israel in mind of their own degeneration and forgetfulness.

He employs those many hands, for the making a large trench round about the altar; and causes it to be filled, with those precious remainders of water, which the people would have grudged to their own mouths; neither would easily have parted with, but, as those that pour down a pailful into a dry pump, in the hope of fetching more. The altar, the trench, is full. A barrelful is poured out for each of the tribes; that every tribe might be afterwards replenished.

Ahab and Israel are no less full of expectation; and now, when God's appointed hour of the evening sacrifice was come, Elijah comes confidently to his altar, and, look-

ing up into heaven, says, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again.'

The Baalites' prayers were not more tedious, than Elijah's was short; and yet more pithy, than short; charging God with the care of his covenant, of his truth, of his glory. It was Elijah, that spake loud. Oh strong cries of faith, that pierce the heavens, and irresistibly make their way to the throne of grace!

Israel shall well see, that Elijah's God, whom they have forsaken, is neither talking, nor pursuing, nor travelling, nor sleeping. Instantly, the fire of the Lord falls from heaven, and consumes the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licks up the water that was in the trench.

With what terror must Ahab and Israel needs see this fire rolling down out of the sky, and alighting with such fury so near their heads; heads, no less fit for this flame, than the sacrifice of Elijah! Well might they have thought, 'How easily might this fire have dilated itself; and have consumed our bodies, as well as the wood and stone; and have licked up our blood, as well as that water!' I know not, whether they had the grace to acknowledge the mercy of God: they could do no less, than confess his power; 'The Lord is God; the Lord is God.'

The iron was now hot with this heavenly fire. Elijah stays not till it cool again, but strikes immediately; 'Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.'

This wager was for life. Had they prevailed in procuring this fire, and Elijah had failed of effect, his head had been forfeited unto them: now, in the contrary success, theirs are lost to him. Let no man complain, that those holy hands were bloody. This sacrifice was no less pleasing to God, than that other. Both the man and the act were extraordinary, and led by a peculiar instinct. Neither doth the prophet this, without the assent of the supreme magistrate; who was now so affected with this

miraculous work, that he could not, in the heat of that conviction, but allow the justice of such a sentence. Far be it from us, to accuse God's commands or executions of cruelty. It was the ancient and peremptory charge of God, that the authors of idolatry and seduction should die the death: no eye, no hand, might spare them. The prophet doth but move the performance of that law, which Israel could not without sin have omitted. It is a merciful and thank-worthy severity, to rid the world of the ringleaders of wickedness.—1 Kings xviii.

ELIJAH RUNNING BEFORE AHAB, FLYING FROM JEZEBEL.

I HEAR no news of the four hundred prophets of the groves. They lie close under the wing of Jezebel, under their pleasing shades; neither will be suffered to undergo the danger of this trial. The carcasses of their fellows help to fill up the half-dry channel of Kishon.

Justice is no sooner done, than Ahab hears news of mercy from Elijah; 'Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.' Their meeting was not more harsh, than their parting was friendly. It seems Ahab had spent all that day fasting, in an eager attendance of those conflicting prophets. It must needs be late, ere the execution could be done. Elijah's part began not till the evening. So far must the king of Israel be, from taking thought for the massacre of those four hundred and fifty Baalites; that now, 'he may go eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a cheerful heart;' for God accepteth this work, and testifies it in the noise of much rain. Every drop of that idolatrous blood was answered, with a shower of rain, with a stream of water; and plenty poured down in every shower. A sensible blessing follows the impartial strokes of severe justice. Nothing is more cruel, than an unjust piety.

No ears but Elijah's could as yet perceive a sound of rain. The clouds were not yet gathered, the vapors were not yet risen, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Those that are of God's counsel can discern either favors or judgments afar off. The slack apprehensions of carnal

hearts make them hard to believe that, as future, which the quick and refined senses of the faithful receive, as present.

Ahab goes up to his repast: Elijah goes up to his prayers. That day had been painful to him: the vehemency of his spirit draws him to a neglect of his body. The holy man climbs up to the top of Carmel, that now he may talk with his God alone; neither is he sooner ascended, than he casts himself down on the earth. He bows his knees to God, and bows his face down to his knees; by this humble posture acknowledging his awful respects to that Majesty, which he implored. We cannot prostrate our bodies or souls too low, to that infinitely glorious Deity, who is the Creator of both.

His thoughts were more high, than his body was low. What he said, we know not; we know that what he said opened the heavens, that for three years and a half had been shut up.

God had said before, 'I will send rain upon the earth;' yet Elijah must pray for what God did promise. The promises of the Almighty do not discharge our prayers, but suppose them. He will do what he undertakes, but we must sue for that, which we would have him do. Our petitions are included in the decrees, in the engagements, of God.

The prophet had newly seen, and caused, the fire to descend immediately out of heaven: he doth not look the water should do so. He knew that the rain must come from the clouds, and that the clouds must arise from vapors, and those vapors from the sea: thence doth he expect them. But, as not willing that the thoughts of his fixed devotion should be distracted, he doth not go himself, only sends his servant to bring him the news of his success.

At the first sight, nothing appears. Seven times must he walk to that prospect; and not till his last view can discern aught. All that while is the prophet in his prayers; neither is any whit daunted with that delay. Hope holds up the head of our holy desires, and perseverance crowns it. If we receive not an answer to our suits at

the sixth motion, we may not be out of countenance, but must try the seventh.

At last, a little cloud arises out of the sea, of a hand breadth. So many, so fervent prayers cannot but pull water out of heaven, as well as fire. Those sighs reflect on the earth, and from the earth reflect on heaven, from heaven rebound on the sea, and raise vapors up thence to heaven again.

If we find that our prayers are heard for the substance, we may not cavil at the quantity. Even a hand-broad cloud contents Elijah; and fills his heart full of joy and thankfulness. He knew well this meteor was not at the biggest: it was newly born of the womb of the waters; and, in some minutes of age, must grow to a large stature: stay but a while, and heaven is covered with it. From how small beginnings, have greater matters risen! It is no otherwise, in all the gracious proceedings of God with the soul. Scarce sensible are those first works of his Spirit in the heart, which grow up at last, to the wonder of men and applause of angels.

Well did Elijah know, that God, who is perfection itself, would not defile his hand, with an inchoate and scanted favor; as one therefore, that foresaw the face of heaven overspread with this cloudy spot, he sends to Ahab, to hasten his chariot, that the rain stop him not. It is long, since Ahab feared this let. Never was the news of a danger more welcome. Doubtless, the king of Israel, while he was at his diet, looked long for Elijah's promised showers. 'Where is the rain, whose sound the prophet heard? How is it, that his ears were so much quicker, than our eyes? We saw his fire to our terror; how gladly would we see his waters!' When now, the servant of Elijah brings him news from heaven, that the clouds were setting forward, and, if he hastened not, would be before him.

The wind arises; the clouds gather; the sky thickens; Ahab betakes him to his chariot; Elijah girds up his loins, and runs before him. Surely, the prophet could not want the offer of more ease in his passage; but he will be, for the time, Ahab's lackey, that the king and

all Israel may see his humility no less than his power, and may confess that the glory of those miracles hath not made him insolent. He knew, that his very sight was monitory; neither could Ahab's mind be beside the miraculous works of God, while his eye was on Elijah; neither could the king's heart be otherwise than well affected towards the prophet, while he saw that himself and all Israel had received a new life by his procurement.

But what news was here for Jezebel! Certainly, Ahab minced nothing of the report of all those astonishing accidents. If but to salve up his own honor, in the death of those Baalites, he made the best of Elijah's merits; he told of his challenge, conflict, victory, of the fire that fell down from heaven, of the conviction of Israel, of the unavoidable execution of the prophets, of the prediction and fall of those happy showers, and lastly of Elijah's officious attendance.

Who would not have expected, that Jezebel should have said; 'It is no striving, no dallying, with the Almighty. No reasonable creature can doubt, after so prodigious a decision. God hath won us from heaven; he must possess us. Justly are our seducers perished. None but the God, that can command fire and water, shall be ours: there is no prophet, but his.'

But she, contrarily, instead of relenting, rageth; and sends a message of death to Elijah, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them, by to morrow, about this time.' Neither scourges nor favors can work any thing with the obstinately wicked.

All evil hearts are not equally disaffected to good. Ahab and Jezebel were both bad enough, yet Ahab yields to that work of God, which Jezebel stubbornly opposeth; Ahab melts with that water, with that fire, wherewith Jezebel is hardened; Ahab was bashfully, Jezebel audaciously impious. The weaker sex is ever most commonly stronger in passion, and more vehemently carried with the sway of their desires, whether to good or evil. She swears and stamps at that, whereat she should have trembled. She swears by those gods of hers, which were not able to

save their prophets, that she will kill the prophet of God, who had scorned her gods, and slain her prophets.

It is well, that Jezebel could not keep counsel. Her threat preserved him, whom she had meant to kill. The wisdom and power of God could have found evasions for his prophet, in her greatest secresy; but now, he needs no other means of rescue, but her own lips.

She is no less vain, than the gods she swears by. In spite of her fury, and her oath, and her gods, Elijah shall live. At once, shall she find herself frustrate and forsworn. She is now ready to bite her tongue, to eat her heart, for anger, at the disappointment of her cruel vow. It were no living for godly men, if the hands of tyrants were allowed to be as bloody as their hearts. Men and devils are under the restraint of the Almighty; neither are their designs more lavish, than their executions short.

Holy Elijah flees for his life. We hear not of the command of God, but we would willingly presuppose it. So divine a prophet should do nothing without God. His heels were no new refuge. As no where safe within the ten tribes, he flees to Beersheba, in the territories of Judah. As not there safe from the machinations of Jezebel, he flees alone, one day's journey, into the wilderness. There he sits him down, under a juniper tree; and, as weary of life no less than of his way, wishes to rise no more; 'It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'

O strange and uncouth mutation! What is this we hear? Elijah fainting and giving up! That heroical spirit dejected and prostrate! He, that durst say to Ahab's face, 'It is thou, and thy father's house, that troubleth Israel;' he, that could raise the dead, open and shut the heavens, fetch down both fire and water, with his prayers; he, that durst chide and contest with all Israel, that durst kill the four hundred and fifty Baalites with the sword; doth he shrink at the frowns and threats of a woman? doth he wish to be rid of his life, because he feared to lose it? Who can expect an undaunted constancy from flesh and blood, when Elijah fails? The strongest and holiest saint on earth, is subject to some

qualms of fear and infirmity. To be always and unchangeably good, is proper only to the glorious spirits in heaven. Thus the wise and holy God will have his power perfected in our weakness. It is in vain for us, while we carry this flesh about us, to hope for so exact health, as not to be cast down sometimes with fits of spiritual distemper.

It is no new thing, for holy men to wish for death. Who can either marvel at or blame the desire of advantage? For the weary traveller to long for rest, the prisoner for liberty, the banished for home, it is so natural, that the contrary disposition were monstrous. The benefit of the change is a just motive to our appetition; but to call for death out of a satiety of life, out of an impatience of suffering, is a weakness unbeseeming a saint. It is not enough, O Elijah. God hath more work yet for thee. Thy God hath more honored thee than thy fathers, and thou shalt live to honor him.

Toil and sorrow have lulled the prophet asleep, under his juniper tree. That wholesome shade was well chosen, for his repose. While death was called for, the cousin of death comes, unbidden.

The angel of God waits on him, in that hard lodging. No wilderness is too solitary, for the attendance of those blessed spirits. As he is guarded, so is he awaked, by that messenger of God; and stirred up from his rest, to his repast. While he slept, his breakfast is made ready for him, by those spiritual hands; 'there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head.' Oh the never ceasing care and providence of the Almighty; not to be barred by any place, by any condition! When means are wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourselves, when to God, even then doth he follow us with his mercy, and cast favors on us, beyond, against expectation.

What variety of purveyance doth he make for his servant! One while the ravens, then the Sareptan, now the angel shall be his caterer: none of them without a miracle. Those other provided for him waking; this, sleeping. O God, the eye of thy providence is not dimmer, the hand of thy power is not shorter: only teach thou us to serve thee, to trust thee.

Needs must the prophet eat, and drink, and sleep, with much comfort, while he saw that he had such a guardian, attendance, purveyor; and now, the second time, is he raised, by that happy touch, to his meal and his way: 'Arise, and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.' What needed he to travel further, since that divine power could as well protect him in the wilderness, as in Horeb? What needed he to eat, since he, that meant to sustain him forty days with one meal, might as well have sustained him without it? God is a most free agent; neither will he be tied to the terms of human regularities: it is enough, that he knows and approves the reasons of his own choice and commands.

Once in forty days and nights shall Elijah eat, to teach us what God can do with little means; and but once, to teach us what he can do without means: once shall the prophet eat, 'Man lives by bread;' and but once, 'Man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'

Moses, Elijah, our Saviour, fasted each of them forty days and forty nights. The three great fasters met gloriously in Tabor. I do not find where God ever honored any man for feasting. It is abstinence, not fulness, that makes a man capable of heavenly visions, of divine glory.

The journey was not, of itself, so long: the prophet took those ways, those hours, which his heart gave him.

In the very same mount, where Moses first saw God, shall Elijah see him. One and the same cave, as is very probable, was the receptacle to both. It could not be but a great confirmation of Elijah, to renew the sight of those sensible monuments of God's favor and protection, to his faithful predecessor. Moses came to see God in the bush of Horeb: God came to find Elijah in the cave of Horeb; 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

The place was directed by a providence, not by a command. He is hid sure enough from Jezebel; he cannot be hid from the all-seeing eye of God. 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I fly from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there: if I take the

wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmost parts of sea; even there shall thine hand find me, and thy right hand shall hold me.'

Twice hath God propounded the same question to Elijah: once in the heart, once in the mouth of the cave: twice doth the prophet answer, in the same words. Had the first answer satisfied, the question had not been redemanded. Now, that sullen answer, which Elijah gave in the darkness of the cave, is challenged into the light, not without an awful preface.

The Lord first passeth by him, with the terrible demonstrations of his power; 'A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake the rocks in pieces.' The tearing blast was from God; God was not in it: so was he in it, as in his other extraordinary works; not so in it, as by it to impart himself to Elijah. It was the usher, not the carriage, of God.

After the wind, came an earthquake; more fearful than it. That did but move the air; this, the earth: that beat on some prominences of earth; this shook it from the centre.

After the earthquake, came a fire; more fearful than either. The other affected the ear, the feeling; but this lets in horror into the soul, by the eye, the quickest and most apprehensive of the senses. Elijah shall see God's mighty power in the earth, air, fire, before he hear him in the soft voice.

All these are but boisterous harbingers of a meek and still word. In that, God was. Behold, in that gentle and mild breath, there was omnipotency; there was but powerfulness, in those fierce representations. There is not always the greatest efficacy, where is the greatest noise. God loves to make way for himself, by terror; but he conveys himself to us, in sweetness. It is happy for us, if, after the gusts and flashes of the law, we have heard the soft voice of evangelical mercy.

In this very mount, with the same horror, God had delivered his law to Moses and Israel. It is no marvel, if Elijah wrapt his face in his mantle. His obedience draws him forth, to the mouth of the cave; his fear still hides his head. Had there not been much courage in

the prophet's faith, he had not stood out these affrightful forerunners of the divine presence, though with his face covered. The very angels do no less, before that all-glorious Majesty, than vail themselves with their wings: far be it from us, once to think of that infinite and omnipotent Deity, without an humble awfulness.

Fear changes not the tenor of Elijah's answer. He hath not left one word behind him in the cave; 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

I hear not a direct answer from the prophet, to the demand of God: then he had said, 'I run away from the threats of Jezebel; and here I hide my head from her malicious pursuit.' His guiltiness would not let him speak out all. He would rather say, 'I have been jealous for the Lord God of Hosts,' than, 'I was fearful of Jezebel.' We are all willing, to make the best of our own case. But what he wants of his own accusation, he spends on the complaint of Israel. Neither doth he more bemoan himself, than exclaim against them, as apostates from God's covenant, violaters of his altars, murderers of his prophets. It must needs be a desperate condition of Israel, that drives Elijah to indict them before the throne of God. That tongue of his was used to plead for them, to sue for their pardon; it could not be but a forcible wickedness, that makes it their accuser.

Those idolatrous Israelites were well forward to reformation. The fire and rain from heaven, at the prayers of Elijah, had won them to a scorn of Baal: only the violence of Jezebel turned the stream; and now, they are resettled in impiety, and persecute him for an enemy, whom they almost adored for a benefactor; otherwise, Elijah had not complained of what they had been. Who would think it? Jezebel can do more than Elijah! No miracle is so prevalent with the vulgar, as the sway of authority, whether to good or evil.

Thou art deceived, O Elijah. Thou art not left alone; neither is all Israel tainted. God hath children and pro-

phets in Israel, though thou see them not. Those clear eyes of the seer discern not the secret story of God. They looked not into Obadiah's caves; they looked not into the closets of the religious Israelites. He, that sees the heart, can say, 'I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.' According to the fashion of the wealthy, God pleaseth himself in hidden treasures. It is enough, that his own eyes behold his riches. Never did he, never will he leave himself unfurnished with holy clients, in the midst of the foulest depravations of his church. The sight of his faithful ones hath sometimes been lost; never the being. Do your worst, O ye gates of hell, God will have his own. He, that could have more, will have some. That foundation is sure, 'God knoweth who are his.'

It was a true cordial for Elijah's solitariness, that he had seven thousand invisible abettors; neither is it a small comfort to our weakness, to have companions in good.

For the wickedness of Israel, God hath another receipt; the oil of royal and prophetical unction. Elijah must anoint Hazael king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, Elisha for his successor. All these shall revenge the quarrels of God and him: one shall begin, the other shall prosecute, the third shall perfect, the vengeance on Israel.

A prophet shall avenge the wrongs done to a prophet. Elisha is found, not in his study, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but a plough. His father Shaphat was a rich farmer, in Abel-Meholah: himself was a good husband; not trained in the schools of the prophets, but in the thrifty trade of tillage: and behold, this was the man, whom God will pick out of all Israel, for a prophet. God seeth not as man seeth; neither doth he choose men before they are fit, but therefore he fits them, because he hath chosen them: his call is above all earthly institution.

I hear not of aught that Elijah said: only he casts his cloak on Elisha, in the passage. That mantle, that act, was vocal. Together with this sign, God's instinct teacheth this amazed son of Shaphat, that he was designed to

a higher work, to break up the fallow grounds of Israel, by his prophetical function. He finds a strange virtue in that robe; and, as if his heart were changed with that habit, forgets his team, and runs after Elijah; and sues for the leave of a farewell to his parents, ere he had any but a dumb command to follow. The secret call of God offers an inward force to the heart, and insensibly draws us beyond the power of our resistance. Grace is no enemy to good-nature. Well may the respects to our earthly parents, stand with our duties to our Father in heaven.

I do not see Elisha wring his hands and deplore his condition, that he shall leave the world and follow a prophet, but, for the joy of that change, he makes a feast. Those oxen, those utensils of husbandry, whereon his former labors had been bestowed, shall now be gladly devoted to the celebration of that happy day, wherein he is honored with so blessed an employment. If with desire, if with cheerfulness, we do not enter into the works of our heavenly Master, they are not like to prosper in our hands. He is not worthy of this spiritual station, who holds not the service of God his highest, his richest preferment.—1 Kings xviii. xix.

BOOK XIX.

AHAB AND BENHADAD.

There is nothing more dangerous for any state, than to call in foreign powers, for the suppressing of a homebred enemy. The remedy hath oft, in this case, proved worse than the disease. Asa, king of Judah, implores the aid of Benhadad the Syrian, against Baasha king of Israel. That stranger hath good color, to set his foot in some outskirt-towns of Israel; and now these serve him but for the handsel of more. Such sweetness doth that Edomite find in the soil of Israel, that his ambition will not take up with less than all. He, that entered as a friend, will proceed as a conqueror; and now aims at no less than Samaria itself, the heart, the head of the ten

tribes. There was no cause to hope for better success, of so perfidious a league with an infidel.

Who can look for other than war, when he sees Ahab and Jezebel in the throne; Israel in the groves and temples of Baalim? The ambition of Benhadad was not so much guilty of this war, as the idolatry of that wicked nation. How can they expect peace from earth, who do wilfully fight against heaven! Rather will the God of Hosts arm the brute, the senseless creatures against Israel, than he will suffer their defiance unrevenged.

Ahab and Benhadad are well matched; an idolatrous Israelite, with a paganish Idumæan. Well may God plague each with other, who means vengeance to them both.

Ahab finds himself hard pressed with the siege; and therefore is glad to enter into treaties of peace. Benhadad knows his own strength, and offers insolent conditions; 'Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.' It is a fearful thing to be in the mercy of an enemy. In case of hostility, might will carve for itself.

Ahab now, after the division of Judah, was but half a king; Benhadad had two and thirty kings to attend him. What equality was in this opposition? Wisely doth Ahab therefore, as a reed in a tempest, stoop to this violent charge of so potent an enemy; 'My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.' It is not for the overpowered, to capitulate. Weakness may not argue, but yield.

Tyranny is but drawn on by submission; and, where it finds fear and dejection, insulteth. Benhadad, not content with the sovereignty of Ahab's goods, calls for the possession. Ahab had offered the dominion, with reservation of his subordinate interest: he will be a tributary, so he may be an owner: Benhadad imperiously, besides the command, calls for the propriety; and suffers not the king of Israel to enjoy those things at all, which he would enjoy but under the favor of that predominancy.

Over-strained subjection turns desperate. If conditions be imposed worse than death, there needs no long disputation of the remedy. The elders of Israel, whose

share was proportionably in this danger, hearten Ahab to a denial; which yet comes out so fearfully, as that it appears rather extorted by the peremptory indignation of the people, than proceeding out of any generosity of his spirit: neither doth he say, 'I will not,' but 'I may not.'

The proud Syrian, who would have taken it in foul scorn to be denied, though he had sent for all the heads of Israel, snuffs up the wind, like the wild ass in the wilderness, and brags, and threats, and swears, 'The gods do so to me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.' Not the men, not the goods only of Samaria shall be carried away captive, but the very earth whereon it stands; and this, with how much ease! No soldier shall need to be charged with more than a handful, to make a valley, where the mother city of Israel once stood.

O vain boaster! in whom I know not whether pride or folly be more eminent. Victory is to be achieved; not to be sworn. Future events are no matter of an oath. Thy gods (if they had been) might have been called as witnesses of thy intentions; not of that success, whereof thou wouldest be the author without them. Thy gods can do nothing to thee; nothing for thee; nothing for themselves. All thine Aramites shall not carry away one corn of sand out of Israel, except it be on the soles of their feet, in their shameful flight: it is well, if they can carry back those skins that they brought thither. 'Let not him, that girdeth on his harness, boast himself, as he that putteth it off.' There is no cause to fear that man that trusts in himself. Man may cast the dice of war, but the disposition of them is of the Lord.

Ahab was lewd, but Benhadad was insolent; if therefore Ahab shall be scourged with the rod of Benhadad's fear, Benhadad shall be smitten with the sword of Ahab's revenge. Of all things, God will not endure a presumptuous and self-confident vaunter.

After Elijah's flight and complaint, yet a prophet is addressed to Ahab; 'Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.' Who can wonder enough at this un-

weariable mercy of God? After the fire and rain fetched miraculously from heaven, Ahab had promised much, performed nothing; yet again will God bless and solicit him with victory. One of those prophets, whom he persecuted to death, shall comfort his dejection, with the news of deliverance and triumph.

Had this great work been wrought without premonition, either chance, or Baal, or the golden calves, had carried away the thanks; beforehand therefore shall Ahab know, both the author and the means of his victory; God for the author, the two hundred thirty-two young men of the princes for the means.

What are these for the vanguard, and seven thousand Israelites for the main battle, against the troops of three-and-thirty kings, and as many centuries of Syrians as Israel had single soldiers? An equality of number had taken away the wonder of the event; but now, the God of Hosts will be confessed in this issue, not the valor of men. How indifferent it is with thee, O Lord, to save by many, or by few; to destroy many or few! A world is no more to thee, than a man. How easy is it for thee to enable us to be more than conquerors over principalities and powers; to subdue spiritual wickednesses to flesh and blood! Through thee, we can do great things; yea, we can do all things, through thee that strengthenest us. Let not us want faith, we are sure there can be no want in thy power or mercy.

There was nothing in Benhadad's pavilions, but drink, and surfeit, and jollity; as if wine should make way for blood. Security is the certain usher of destruction. We never have so much cause to fear, as when we fear nothing.

This handful of Israel dares look out, on the prophet's assurance, to the vast host of Benhadad.

It is enough for that proud pagan, to sit still and command amongst his cups. To defile their fingers with the blood of so few, seemed no mastery: that act would be inglorious, on the part of the victors. More easily might they bring in three heads of dead enemies, than one alive: imperiously enough therefore doth this boaster, out of his chair of state and ease, command, 'Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be

come out for war, take them alive.' There needs no more, but, 'Take them:' this field is won with a word. Oh the vain and ignorant presumptions of wretched men, that will be reckoning without, against their Maker!

Every Israelite kills his man. The Syrians flee; and cannot run away from death. Benhadad and his kings are more beholding to their horses, than to their gods or themselves, for life and safety; else they had been either taken or slain, by those whom they commanded to be taken.

How easy is it for him, that made the heart, to fill it with terror and consternation, even where no fear is! Those, whom God hath destined to slaughter, he will smite; neither needs he any other enemy or executioner, than what he finds in their own bosom. We are not the masters of our own courage or fears: both are put into us, by that overruling power that created us.

Stay now, oh stay, thou great king of Syria; and take with thee those forgotten handfuls of the dust of Israel. Thy gods will do so to thee, and more also, if thy followers return without their vowed burden. Learn now of the despised king of Israel, from henceforth not to sound the triumph before the battle; not to boast thyself, in the girding on of thy harness, as in the putting off.

I hear not of either the public thanksgiving, or amendment of Ahab. Neither danger nor victory can change him from himself. Benhadad and he, though enemies, agree in unrepentance: the one is no more moved with mercy, than the other with judgment.

Neither is God any changeling in his proceedings towards both. His judgment shall still follow the Syrian; his mercy, Israel: mercy both in forewarning and redelivering Ahab; judgment, in overthrowing Benhadad.

The prophet of God comes again, and both foretells the intended rencounter of the Syrian, and advises the care and preparation of Israel; 'Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest; for, at the return of the year, the king of Syria will come up against thee.' God purposeth the deliverance of Israel; yet may not they neglect their fortifications. The merciful intentions of

God towards them may not make them careless. The industry and courage of the Israelites fall within the decree of their victory. Security is the bane of good success.

It is no contemning of a foiled enemy. The shame of a former disgrace and miscarriage whets his valor, and sharpens it to revenge. No power is so dreadful, as that which is recollected from an overthrow.

The hostility against the Israel of God may sleep, but will hardly die. If the Aramites sit still, it is but till they be fully ready for an assault: time will show, that their cessation was only for their advantage. Neither is it otherwise with our spiritual adversaries; sometimes their onsets are intermitted: they tempt not always; they always hate us: their forbearance is not out of favor, but attendance of opportunity. Happy are we, if, out of a suspicion of their silence, we can as busily prepare for their resistance, as they do for our impugnation.

As it is a shame to be beaten, so yet the shame is less, by how much the victor is greater. To mitigate the grief and indignation of Benhadad's foil, his parasites ascribe it to gods, not to men: a human power could no more have vanquished him, than a divine power could by him be resisted; 'Their gods are gods of the hills.'

Ignorant Syrians, that name gods, and confine them; varying their deities, according to situations! They saw that Samaria, whence they were repelled, stood on the hill of Shemer: they saw the temple of Jerusalem stood on mount Sion: they knew it usual with the Israelites, to sacrifice in their high places; and perhaps they had heard of Elijah's altar on mount Carmel: and now they sottishly measure the effects of the power, by the place of the worship; as if He, that was omnipotent on the hill, were impotent in the valley.

What doltish conceits, doth blind paganism frame to itself, of a godhead! As they have many gods, so finite. Every region, every hill, every dale, every stream, hath its several gods; and each so knows his own bounds, that he dares not offer to encroach on the other; or, if he do, buys it with loss. Who would think, that so gross blockishness should find harbor in a reasonable soul? A man doth not

alter with his station. He, that wrestled strongly on the hill, loseth not his force in the plain: all places find him alike active, alike valorous; yet these barbarous Aramites shame not, to imagine that of God, which they would blush to affirm of their own champions. Superstition infatuates the heart, out of measure; neither is there any fancy so absurd or monstrous, which credulous infidelity is not ready to entertain with applause.

In how high scorn doth God take it, to be thus basely undervalued by rude heathen! This very mis-opinion concerning the God of Israel, shall cost the Syrians a shameful and perfect destruction. They may call a council of war, and lay their heads together, and change their kings into captains and their hills into valleys, but they shall find more graves in the plains, than in the mountains. This very misprision of God shall make Ahab, though he were more lewd, victorious. A hundred thousand Syrians shall fall in one day, by those few hands of Israel; and a dead wall in Aphek, to whose shelter they fled, shall revenge God on the rest that remained. The stones in the wall shall rather turn executioners, than a blasphemous Aramite shall escape unrevenged. So much doth the jealous God hate to be robbed of his glory, even by ignorant pagans, whose tongues might seem no slander!

That proud head of Benhadad, that spoke such big words of the dust of Israel, and swore by his gods, that he would kill and conquer, is now glad to hide itself in a blind hole of Aphek; and now, instead of questioning the power of the God of Israel, is glad to hear of the mercy of the kings of Israel; 'Behold, now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.'

There can be no more powerful attractive of humble submission, than the intimation and conceit of mercy. We do, at once, fear and hate the inexorable. This is it, O Lord, that allures us to thy throne of grace, the knowledge of the grace of that throne. With thee is mercy, and plenteous redemption. Thy hand is open before our mouths; before our hearts. If we did not see thee smile

on suitors, we durst not press to thy footstool. Behold now, we know that the King of heaven, the God of Israel, is a merciful God: let us put sackcloth on our loins, and strew ashes on our heads, and go meet the Lord God of Israel, that he may save our souls.

How well doth this habit become insolent and blasphemous Benhadad and his followers, a rope and sackcloth! A rope, for a crown; sackcloth, for a robe.

Neither is there less change in the tongue; 'Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee let me live.' Even now the king of Israel said to Benhadad, 'My lord, O king, I am thine: tell my lord the king, all that thou didst send for to thy servant, I will do.' Now Benhadad sends to the king of Israel, 'Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live.' He, that was erewhile a lord and king, is now a servant; and he, that was a servant to the king of Syria, is now his lord: he, that would blow away all Israel in dust, is now glad to beg for his own life at the door of a despised enemy. No courage is so haughty, which the God of Hosts cannot easily bring under. What are men or devils, in those Almighty hands?

The greater the dejection was, the stronger was the motive of commiseration. That halter pleaded for life; and that plea but for a life, stirred the bowels for favor. How readily did Ahab see in Benhadad's sudden misery, the image of the instability of all human things! and relents at the view of so deep and passionate a submission.

Had not Benhadad said, 'Thy servant,' Ahab had never said, 'My brother.' Seldom ever was there loss in humility. How much less can we fear disparagement, in the annihilating of ourselves before that Infinite Majesty!

The drowning man snatches at every twig. It is no marvel, if the messengers of Benhadad caught hastily at that last of grace, and hold it fast, 'Thy brother Benhadad.'

Favors are wont to draw on each other: kindnesses breed on themselves; neither need we any other persuasion to beneficence, than from our own acts. Ahab calls for the king of Syria; sets him in his own chariot; treats with him of an easy, yet firm, league; gives him both his life and his kingdom.

stood too near the smoke of Jezebel's chimnies; too much within the prospect of Ahab's window.

Now lately had the king of Israel been twice victorious over the Syrians. No sooner is he returned home, than he is overcome with evil desires. The foil he gave was not worse than that he took. There is more true glory in the conquest of our lusts, than in all the bloody trophies. In vain shall Ahab boast of subduing a foreign enemy, while he is subdued by a domestic enemy within his own breast.

Opportunity and convenience are guilty of many a theft. Had not this ground lain so fair, Ahab had not been tempted.

His eye lets in this evil guest into the soul, which now dares come forth at the mouth. 'Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house; and I will give thee a better vineyard for it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.'

Yet had Ahab so much civility and justice, that he would not wring Naboth's patrimony out of his hand by force, but requires it on a fair composition, whether of price or of exchange. His government was vicious; not tyrannical. Propriety of goods was inviolably maintained by him. No less was Naboth allowed to claim a right in his vineyard, than Ahab in his palace. This we owe to lawful sovereignty, to call aught our own; and well worthy is this privilege, to be repaid with all humble and loyal respects.

The motion of Ahab, had it been to any other than an Israelite, had been as just, equal, reasonable, as the repulse had been rude, churlish, inhuman. It is fit, that princes should receive due satisfaction, in the just demands, not only of their necessities, but convenience and pleasure. Well may they challenge this retribution, to the benefit of our common peace and protection. If there be any sweetness in our vineyards, any strength in our fields, we may thank their sceptres. Justly may they expect from us the commodity, the delight of their habitation; and if we gladly yield not to their full elbow-room, both of sight and provision, we can be no other than un-

grateful. Yet dares not Naboth give any other answer to so plausible a motion, than, 'The Lord forbid it me, that I should give thee the inheritance of my fathers.' The honest Israelite saw violence in this ingenuity. There are no stronger commands, than the requests of the great. It is well, that Ahab will not wrest away this patrimony: it is not well that he desired it. The land was not so much stood upon, as the law. One earth might be as good as another; and money equivalent to either. The Lord had forbidden to alien their inheritance: Naboth did not fear loss, but sin. What Naboth might not lawfully do, Ahab might not lawfully require.

It pleased God, to be very punctual and cautelous, both in the distinction and preservation of the entireness of these Jewish inheritances. Nothing but extreme necessity might warrant a sale of land; and that, but for a time: if not sooner, yet at the jubilee, it must revert to the first owner. It was not without a comfortable signification, that, whosoever had once his part in the Land of Promise, could never lose it.

Certainly, Ahab could not but know this divine restriction, yet doubts not to say, 'Give me thy vineyard.' The unconscionable will know no other law, but their profit, their pleasure. A lawless greatness hates all limitations, and abides not to hear men should need any other warrant but will.

Naboth dares not be thus tractable. How gladly would he be quit of his inheritance, if God would acquit him from the sin! Not out of wilfulness, but obedience, doth this faithful Israelite hold off from this demand of his sovereign; not daring to please an earthly king, with offending the heavenly. When princes command lawful things, God commands by them; when unlawful, they command against God. Passive obedience we must give; active, we may not. We follow them as subordinate, not as opposite, to the Highest.

Who cannot but see and pity the straits of honest Naboth? Ahab requires what God forbids. He must fall out, either with his God or his king. Conscience carries him against policy; and he resolved not to sin, that he

might be gracious. For a world, he may not give his vineyard.

Those, who are themselves godless, think the holy care of others but idly scrupulous. The king of Israel could not choose but see, that only God's prohibition lay in the way of his designs; not the stomach of a froward subject: yet he goes away into his house, heavy and displeased: and casts himself down on his bed, turns away his face, and refuses his meat. He hath taken a surfeit of Naboth's grapes, which mars his appetite and threats his life.

How ill can great hearts endure to be crossed, though on the most reasonable and just grounds! Ahab's place called him to the guardianship of God's law; and now, his heart is ready to break, that this parcel of that law may not be broken. No marvel, if he made not dainty to transgress a local statute of God, who did so shamefully violate the eternal law of both tables.

I know not, whether the spleen or the gall of Ahab be more affected. Whether more of anger or grief, I cannot say; but sick he is, and keeps his bed, and balks his meat, as if he should die of no other death, than the salads that he would have had. Oh, the impotent passion and insatiable desires of covetousness! Ahab is lord and king of all the territories of Israel; Naboth is the owner of one poor vineyard: Ahab cannot enjoy Israel, if Naboth enjoy his vineyard. Besides Samaria, Ahab was the great lord paramount of Damascus and all Syria, the victor of him that was attended with two-and-thirty kings; Naboth was a plain townsman of Jezreel, the good husband of a little vineyard: Whether is the wealthier? I do not hear Naboth wish for any thing of Ahab's; I hear Ahab wishing, not without indignation of a repulse, for somewhat from Naboth. Riches and poverty are no more in the heart, than in the hand. He is wealthy, that is contented; he is poor, that wanteth more. O rich Naboth, that carest not for all the large possessions of Ahab; so thou mayest be the lord of thine own vineyard! O miserable Ahab, that carest not for thine own possessions, whilst thou mayest not be the lord of Naboth's vineyard!

He, that caused the disease, sends him a physician.

Satan knew of old, how to make use of such helpers. Jezebel comes to Ahab's bed-side, and casts cold water in his face, and puts into him spirits of her own extracting; 'Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth.' Ahab wanted neither wit nor wickedness; yet is he, in both, a very novice to this Zidonian dame. There needs no other devil than Jezebel; whether to project evil, or to work it. She chides the pusillanimity of her dejected husband; and persuades him his rule cannot be free, unless it be licentious; that there should be no bounds for sovereignty, but will.

Already hath she contrived to have by fraud and force, what was denied to entreaty. Nothing needs but the name, but the seal of Ahab: let her alone with the rest. How present are the wits of the weaker sex, for the devising of wickedness! She frames a letter, in Ahab's name, to the senators of Jezreel, wherein she requires them to proclaim a fast, to suborn two false witnesses against Naboth, to charge him with blasphemy against God and the king, to stone him to death. A ready payment for a rich vineyard!

Whose indignation riseth not, to hear Jezebel name a fast? The great contemners of the most important laws of God, yet can be content to make use of some divine, both statutes and customs, for their own advantage. She knew the Israelites had so much remainder of grace, as to hold blasphemy worthy of death; she knew their manner was, to expiate those crying sins with public humiliation; she knew that two witnesses at least must cast the offender: all these she urges to her own purpose. There is no mischief so devilish, as that which is cloaked with piety. Simulation of holiness doubleth a villany. This murder had not been half so foul, if it had not been thus masked with a religious observation.

Besides devotion, what a fair pretence of legality is here! Blasphemy against God and his anointed may not pass unrevenged. The offender is convened before the sad and severe bench of magistracy. The justice of Israel allows not to condemn an absent, an unheard malefactor. Witnesses come forth, and agree in the intentation of the

crime. The judges rend their garments, and strike their breasts as grieved, not more for the sin than the punishment. Their very countenance must say, 'Naboth should not die, if his offence did not force our justice;' and now, he is no good subject, no true Israelite, that hath not a stone for Naboth.

Jezebel knew well to whom she wrote. Had not those letters fallen on the times of a woful degeneration of Israel, they had received no less strong denials from the elders, than Ahab had from Naboth; 'God forbid, that the senate should forge a perjury, belie truth, condemn innocency, brook corruption. Command just things, we are ready to die in the zeal of our obedience: we dare not embrue our hands in the blood of an innocent.' But she knew whom she had engaged; whom she had marred, by making conscious.

It were strange, if they, who can countenance evil with greatness, should want factors for the unjustest designs. Miserable is that people, whose rulers, instead of punishing, plot and encourage wickedness. When a distillation of evils falls from the head on the lungs of any state, there must needs follow a deadly consumption.

Yet, perhaps, there wanted not some color of pretence for this proceeding. They could not but hear, that some words had passed betwixt the king and Naboth. Haply it was suggested, that Naboth had secretly overlashed into saucy and contemptuous terms to his sovereign; such as neither might be well borne, nor yet, by reason of their privacy, legally convinced. The bench of Jezreel should but supply a form to the just matter and desert of condemnation. What was it for them, to give their hand to this obscure midwifery of justice? It is enough, that their king is an accuser and witness of that wrong, which only their sentence can formally revenge.

All this cannot wash their hands from the guilt of blood. If justice be blind in respect of partiality, she may not be blind in respect of the grounds of execution. Had Naboth been a blasphemer or a traitor, yet these men were no better than murderers. What difference is there, betwixt the stroke of magistracy and of manslaughter, but due conviction?

Wickedness never spake out of a throne, and complained of the defect of instruments. Naboth was, it seems, strictly conscionable; his fellow-citizens, loose and lawless. They are glad to have gotten such an opportunity of his dispatch. No clause of Ahab's letter is not observed. A fast is warned; the city is assembled; Naboth is convented, accused, confronted, sentenced, stoned: his vineyard is escheated to the crown; Ahab takes speedy and quiet possession.

How still doth God sit in heaven, and look on the complots of treachery and villanies, as if they did not concern him! The success so answers their desires, as if both heaven and earth were their friends. It is the plague, which seems the felicity, of sinners, to speed well in their lewd enterprises. No reckoning is brought in the midst of the meal: the end pays for all.

While Ahab is rejoicing in his new garden-plot, and promising himself contentment in this commodious enlargement, in comes Elijah; sent from God, with an errand of vengeance. Methinks, I see how the king's countenance changed; with what aghast eyes and pale cheeks he looked on that unwelcome prophet. Little pleasure took he in his prospect, while it was clogged with such a guest; yet his tongue begins first, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?'

Great is the power of conscience. On the last meeting, for aught we know, Ahab and Elijah parted friends: the prophet had lackeyed his coach, and took a peaceable leave at this town's end: now Ahab's heart told him, neither needed any other messenger, that God and his prophet were fallen out with him. His continuing idolatry, now seconded with blood, bids him look for nothing but frowns from Heaven. A guilty heart can never be at peace. Had not Ahab known how ill he had deserved of God, he had never saluted his prophet by the name of an enemy. He had never been troubled to be found by Elijah, if his own breast had not found him out for an enemy to God.

Much good may thy vineyard do thee, O thou king of Israel. Many fair flowers and savory herbs may thy new garden yield thee. Please thyself with thy Jezebel,

in the triumph over the carcass of a scrupulous subject. Let me rather die with Naboth, than rejoice with thee! His turn is over; thine, is to come. The stones, that overwhelmed innocent Naboth, were nothing to those that smite thee; 'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.'

What meanest thou, O Elijah, to charge this murder on Ahab? He kept his chamber; Jezebel wrote; the elders condemned; the people stoned: yet thou sayest, 'Hast thou killed?' Well did Ahab know, that Jezebel could not give this vineyard with dry hands; yet was he content to wink at what she should do. He but sits still, while Jezebel works: only, his signet is suffered to walk, for the sealing of this unknown purchase. Those, that are trusted with authority, may offend no less in connivancy or neglect, than others in act, in participation. Not only command, consent, countenance, but very permission, feoffs public persons in those sins, which they might and will not prevent.

God loves to punish by retaliation. Naboth and Ahab shall both bleed: Naboth, by the stones of the Jezreelites; Ahab, by the shafts of the Aramites: the dogs shall taste of the blood of both. What Ahab hath done in cruelty, he shall suffer in justice. The case and the end make the difference; happy on Naboth's side, on Ahab's woful: Naboth bleeds as a martyr; Ahab, as a murderer. Whatever is Ahab's condition, Naboth changes a vineyard on earth for a kingdom in heaven. Never any wicked man gained, by the persecution of an innocent: never any innocent man was loser, by suffering from the wicked.

Neither was this judgment personal, but hereditary: 'I will take away thy posterity; and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam. Him, that dieth of Ahab in the city, the dogs shall eat; and him, that dieth in the field, shall the fowls of the air eat.' Ahab shall not need to take thought, for the traducing of this ill-gotten inheritance: God hath taken order for his heirs; whom his sin hath made no less the heirs of his curse than of his body. Their father's cruelty to Naboth hath

made them, together with their mother Jezebel, dogs'-meat. The revenge of God doth, at last, make amends for the delay. Whether now is Naboth's vineyard paid for? The man, that had 'sold himself to work wickedness,' yet rues the bargain.

I do not hear Ahab, as bad as he was, revile or threaten the prophet; but he rends his clothes, and wears and lies in sackcloth, and fasts, and walks softly. Who, that had seen Ahab, would not have deemed him a true penitent? All this was the visor of sorrow, not the face; or if the face, not the heart; or if the sorrow of the heart, yet not the repentance; a sorrow for the judgment, not a repentance for the sin. The very devils howl to be tormented. Grief is not ever a sign of grace. Ahab rends his clothes; he did not rend his heart: he puts on sackcloth, not amendment: he lies in sackcloth, but he lies in his idolatry: he walks softly; he walks not sincerely. 'Worldly sorrow causeth death.' Happy is that grief, for which the soul is the holier.

Yet what is this I see? This very shadow of repentance carries away mercy. It is no small mercy to defer an evil. Even Ahab's humiliation shall prorogue the judgment. Such as the penitence was, such shall be the reward; a temporary reward of a temporary penitence. As Ahab might be thus sorrowful, and never the better; so he may be thus favored, and never the happier. O God, how graciously art thou ready, to reward a sound and holy repentance, who art thus indulgent to a carnal and servile dejection!—1 Kings xxi.

AHAB AND MICAIAH; OR, THE DEATH OF AHAB.

Who would have looked to have heard any more of the wars of the Syrians with Israel, after so great a slaughter, after so firm a league; a league, not of peace only, but of brotherhood? The halters, the sackcloth, of Benhadad's followers, were worn out, as of use, so of memory; and now they are changed for iron and steel.

It is but three years, that this peace lasts; and now that war begins which shall make an end of Ahab. The king of Israel rues his unjust mercy. According to the

word of the prophet, that gift of a life was but an exchange. Because Ahab gave Benhadad his life, Benhadad shall take Ahab's. He must forfeit in himself what he hath given to another. There can be no better fruit of too much kindness to infidels.

It was one article of the league betwixt Ahab and his brother Benhadad, that there should be a speedy restitution of all the Israelitish cities. The rest are yielded: only Ramoth Gilead is held back, unthankfully, injuripusly. He, that begged but his life, receives his kingdom; and now rests not content with his own bounds. Justly doth Ahab challenge his own: justly doth he move a war, to recover his own from a perfidious tributary. The lawfulness of actions may not be judged by the events, but by the grounds. The wise and holy Arbiter of the world knows why, many times the better cause hath the worse success. Many a just business is crossed, for a punishment to the agent.

Yet Israel and Judah were now pieced in friendship. Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, had made affinity with Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel; and, besides a personal visitation, joins his forces with his new kinsman against an old confederate. Judah had called in Syria against Israel; and now Israel calls in Judah against Syria. Thus rather should it be. It is fit, that the more pure church should join with the more corrupt against a common paganish enemy.

Jehoshaphat hath matched with Ahab; not with a divorce of his devotion. He will fight, not without God; 'Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord, to-day.' Had he done thus sooner, I fear Athaliah had never called him father. This motion was news in Israel: it was wont to be said, 'Inquire of Baal.' The good king of Judah will bring religion into fashion in the court of Israel. Ahab had inquired of his counsellors; what needed he be so devout as to inquire of his prophets? Only Jehoshaphat's presence made him thus godly. It is a happy thing, to converse with the virtuous: their counsel and example cannot but leave some tincture behind them, of a good profession, if not of piety. Those, that are truly religious, dare not but take God with them in all their affairs:

with him they can be as valiant, as timorous without him.

Ahab had clergy enough, such as it was. Four hundred prophets of the groves were reserved from appearing to Elijah's challenge. These are now consulted by Ahab. They live to betray the life of him, who saved theirs.

These care not so much to inquire, what God would say, as what Ahab would have them say. They saw which way the king's heart was bent; that way they bent their tongues; 'Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the king.' False prophets care only to please. A plausible falsehood passes with them above a harsh truth. Had they seen Ahab fearful, they had said, 'Peace, peace!' now they see him resolute, 'War and victory.' It is a fearful presage of ruin when the prophets conspire in assentation.

Their number, consent, confidence, hath easily won credit with Ahab. We do all willingly believe what we wish. Jehoshaphat is not so soon satisfied. These prophets were, it is like, obtruded to him, a stranger, for the true prophets of the true God. The judicious king sees cause to suspect them; and now, perceiving at what altars they served, hates to rest in their testimony; 'Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?' One single prophet speaking from the oracles of God, is more worth than four hundred Baalites. Truth may not ever be measured by the poll. It is not number, but weight, that must carry it, in a council of prophets. A solid verity in one mouth, is worthy to preponderate light falsehood in a thousand.

Even king Ahab, as bad as he was, kept tale of his prophets; and could give account of one that was missing. 'There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.'

It is very probable, that Micaiah was that disguised prophet, who brought to Ahab the fearful message of displeasure and death, for dismissing Benhadad; for which he was ever since fast in prison, deep in disgrace.

O corrupt heart of self-condemned Ahab! If Micaiah spake true to thee, how was it evil? if others said false,

how was it good? and if Micaiah spake from the Lord, why dost thou hate him?

This hath wont to be the ancient lot of truth, censure and hatred; censure of the message, hatred of the bearer. To carnal ears the message is evil, if unpleasing; and if plausible, good: if it be sweet, it cannot be poison; if bitter, it cannot be wholesome. The distemper of the receiver is guilty of this misconceit. In itself, every truth, as it is good, so amiable; every falsehood, loathsome as evil. A sick palate cries out of the taste of those liquors which are well allowed of the healthful. It is a sign of a good state of the soul, when every vendure can receive his proper judgment.

Wise and good Jehoshaphat dissuades Ahab from so hard an opinion; and sees cause, so much more to urge the consultation of Micaiah, by how much he finds him more unpleasing. The king of Israel, to satisfy the importunity of so great and dear an ally, sends an officer for Micaiah. He knew well, belike, where to find him; within those four walls where unjust cruelty had disposed of that innocent seer. Out of the obscurity of the prison, is the poor prophet fetched in the light of so glorious a confession of two kings; who thought this convocation of prophets not unworthy of their greatest representation of state and majesty. There he finds Zedekiah, the leader of that false crew; not speaking only, but acting his prediction. Signs were no less used by the prophets, than words. This arch flatterer hath made him horns of iron: the horn is forcible, the iron irresistible: by an irresistible force shall Ahab push the Syrians; as if there were more certainty in this man's hands than in his tongue.

If this son of Chenaanah had not had a forehead of brass for impudency, and a heart of lead for flexibleness to humors and times, he had never devised these horns of iron, wherewith his king was gored unto blood. However, it is enough for him, that he is believed, that he is seconded. All the great inquest of these prophets gave up their verdict by this foreman: not one, of four hundred, dissented. Unanimity of opinion in the greatest ecclesiastical assemblies, is not ever an argument of truth: there may be as common and as firm agreement in error.

The messenger that came for Micaiah, like a carnal friend, sets him in a way of favor: tells him what the rest said, how they pleased; how unsafe it would be for him to vary, how beneficial to assent. Those, that adore earthly greatness, think every man should dote on their idols; and hold no terms too high for their ambitious purposes.

Faithful Micaiah scorns the motion. He knows the price of the word, and contemns it; 'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.' Neither fears nor favors can tempt the holily resolute: they can trample on dangers or honors with a careless foot; and, whether they be smiled or frowned on by the great, dare not either alter or conceal their errand.

The question is moved to Micaiah. He, at first, so yields, that he contradicts; yields in words, contradicts in pronunciation. The syllables are for them, the sound against them. Ironies deny strongest in affirming. And now, being pressed home, he tells them, that God had showed him those sheep of Israel should ere long, by this means, want their shepherd. The very resemblance to a good prince had been affecting. The sheep is a helpless creature; not able either to guard or guide itself. All the safety, all the direction of it, is from the keeper; without whom, every cur chases and worries it, every track seduceth it. Such shall Israel soon be, if Ahab be ruled by his prophets.

The king of Israel doth not believe, but quarrel: not at himself, who had deserved evil, but at the prophet, who foresignified it; and is more careful, that the king of Judah should mark how true he had foretold concerning the prophet, than how the prophet had foretold concerning him.

Bold Micaiah, as no whit discouraged with the unjust checks of greatness, doubles his prediction; and, by a second vision, particulariseth the means of this dangerous error. While the two kings sat majestically in their thrones, he tells them of a more glorious throne than theirs, whereon he saw the King of gods sitting. While they were compassed with some hundreds of prophets and thousands of subjects and soldiers, he tells them of all the host of heaven attending that other throne. While they

were deliberating of a war, he tells them of a God of heaven justly decreeing the judgment of a deadly deception to Ahab.

The decree of the Highest is not more plainly revealed, than expressed parabolically. The wise and holy God is represented, after the manner of men, consulting of that ruin which he intended to the wicked king of Israel. That uncreated and infinite wisdom needs not the advice of any finite and created powers to direct him; needs not the assent and aid of any spirit for his execution; much less of an evil one: yet here an evil spirit is brought in, by way of vision mixed with parable, proffering the service of his lie, accepted, employed, successful.

These figures are not void of truth. The action and event are reduced to a decree: the decree is shadowed out by the resemblance of human proceedings. All evil motions and counsels are originally from that malignant spirit. That evil spirit could have no power over men, but by the permission, by the decree, of the Almighty. That Almighty, as he is no author of sin, so he ordinates all evil to good. It is good, that is just: it is good, that one sin should be punished by another. Satan is herein no other, than the executioner of that God, who is as far from infusing evil, as from not revenging it.

Now Ahab sees the ground of that applaused consent of his rabble of prophets. One evil spirit hath no less deceived them, than they their master. He is one; therefore he agrees with himself: he is evil; therefore both he and they agree in deceit.

Oh the noble and undaunted spirit of Micaiah! Neither the thrones of the kings, nor the number of the prophets, could abate one word of his true, though displeasing, message. The king of Israel shall hear, that he is misled by liars; they, by a devil.

Surely, Jehoshaphat cannot but wonder at so unequal a contention, to see one silly prophet affronting four hundred: with whom, lest confidence should carry it, behold Zedekiah more bold, more zealous. If Micaiah have given him, with his fellows, the lie, he gives Micaiah the fist.

Before these two great guardians of peace and justice,

swaggering Zedekiah smites Micaiah on the face; and, with the blow, expostulates; 'Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me, to speak unto thee?' For a prophet to smite a prophet, in the face of two kings, was intolerably insolent. The act was much unbeseeming the person; more, the presence. Prophets may reprove; they may not strike. It was enough for Ahab to punish with the hand. No weapon was for Zedekiah but his tongue. Neither could this rude presumption have been well taken, if malice had not made magistracy insensible of this usurpation. Ahab was well content to see that hated mouth beaten by any hand. It is no new condition of God's faithful messengers, to smart for saying truth. Falsehood doth not more bewray itself in any thing than in blows. Truth suffers, while error persecutes. None are more ready to boast of the Spirit of God, than those that have the least: as in vessels, the full are silent.

Innocent Micaiah neither defends nor complains. It would have well beseemed the religious king of Judah, to have spoken in the cause of the dumb; to have checked insolent Zedekiah: he is content to give way to this tide of peremptory and general opposition.

The helpless prophet stands alone, yet lays about him with his tongue; 'Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber and hide thyself.' Now, the proud Baalite showed himself too much: ere long, he shall be glad to lurk unseen: his horns of iron cannot bear off his danger. The son of Ahab cannot choose but, in the zeal of revenging his father's deadly seducement, call for that false head of Zedekiah: in vain shall that impostor seek to hide himself from justice: but, in the mean while, he goes away with honor; Micaiah, with censure: 'Take Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.' A hard doom of truth! The jail for his lodging, coarse bread and water for his food, shall but reserve Micaiah for a further revenge. The return of Ahab shall be the bane of the prophet.

Was not this he, that advised Benhadad not to boast in the putting on his armor, as in the ungirding it; and doth he now promise himself peace and victory before he buckle it on? No warning will dissuade the wilful.

So assured doth Ahab make himself of success, that he threats ere he go, what he will do when he returns in peace. How justly doth God deride the misreckonings of proud and foolish men! If Ahab had no other sins, his very confidence shall defeat him.

Yet the prophet cannot be overcome in his resolution: he knows his grounds cannot deceive him, and dare therefore cast the credit of his function on this issue; 'If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me: and he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.' Let him never be called a prophet, that dare not trust his God. This was no adventure therefore of reputation or life. Since he knew whom he believed, the event was no less sure, than if it had been past. He is no God, that is not constant to himself. Hath he spoken, and shall he not perform? What hold have we for our souls, but his eternal word? The being of God is not more sure, than his promises, than his sentences of judgment. Well may we appeal the testimony of the world in both: if there be not plagues for the wicked, if there be not rewards for the righteous, God hath not spoken by us.

Not Ahab only, but good Jehoshaphat, is carried with the multitude. Their forces are joined against Ramoth.

The king of Israel doth not so trust his prophets, that he dares to trust himself in his own clothes. Thus shall he elude Micaiah's threat. I wis, the judgment of God, the Syrian shafts, cannot find him out in this unsuspected disguise! How fondly do vain men imagine to shift off the just revenges of the Almighty!

The king of Syria gives charge to his captains, to fight against none but the king of Israel. Thus doth the unthankful infidel repay the mercy of his late victor. *Ill* was the snake saved, that requites the favor of his life with a sting. Thus still, the greatest are the fairest mark to envious eyes. By how much more eminent any man is in the Israel of God, so many more, and more dangerous enemies must he expect. Both earth and hell con-

spire in their opposition to the worthiest. Those, who are advanced above others, have so much more need of the guard, both of their own vigilancy and others' prayers.

Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his love. He is pursued for him in whose amity he offended. His cries deliver him; his cries, not to his pursuers, but to his God; whose mercy takes not advantage of our infirmity, but rescues us from those evils which we wilfully provoke. It is Ahab, against whom, not the Syrians only, but God himself intends this quarrel. The enemy is taken off from Jehoshaphat.

Oh the just and mighty hand of that Divine Providence which directeth all our actions to his own ends; which takes order where every shaft shall light; and guides the arrow of the strong archer into the joints of Ahab's harness! It was shot at a venture: falls by a destiny; and there falls, where it may carry death to a hidden debtor. In all actions, both voluntary and casual, thy will, O God, shall be done by us, with whatever intentions. Little did the Syrian know whom he had stricken; no more than the arrow wherewith he struck. An invisible hand disposed of both, to the punishment of Ahab, to the vindication of Micaiah. How worthily, O God, art thou to be adored, in thy justice and wisdom; to be feared, in thy judgments!

Too late doth Ahab now think of the fair warnings of Micaiah, which he unwisely contemned; of the painful flatteries of Zedekiah, which he stubbornly believed. That guilty blood of his runs down out of his wound into the midst of his chariot, and pays Naboth his arrearages. O Ahab, what art thou the better for thine ivory house, while thou hast a black soul? What comfort hast thou now in those flattering prophets, which tickled thine ears and secured thee of victories? What joy is it to thee now, that thou wast great? Who would not rather be Micaiah in the jail, than Ahab in the chariot? Wicked men have the advantage of the way; godly men, of the end.

The chariot is washed in the pool of Samaria: the dogs come to claim their due; they lick up the blood of the king of Israel. The tongues of those brute creatures shall

make good the tongue of God's prophet. Micaiah is justified; Naboth is revenged; the Baalites confounded; Ahab judged: 'Righteous art thou, O God, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works.'—1 Kings xxii. 2 Chron. xviii.

AHAZIAH SICK, AND ELIJAH REVENGED.

Ahaziah succeeded his father Ahab, both in his throne and in his sin. Who could look for better issue of those loins, of those examples?

God follows him with a double judgment; of the revolt of Moab, and of his own sickness. All the reign of Ahab had Moab been a quiet tributary; and furnished Israel with rich flocks and fleeces: now their subjection dies with that warlike king, and will not be inherited. This rebellion took advantage, as from the weaker spirits, so from the sickly body of Ahaziah; whose disease was not natural, but casual. Walking in his palace of Samaria, some grate in the floor of his chamber breaks under him; and gives way to that fall, whereby he is bruised and languisheth. The same hand, that guided Ahab's shaft, cracks Ahaziah's lattice. How infinite variety of plagues hath the just God for obstinate sinners! Whether in the field or in the chamber, he knows to find them out. How fearlessly did Ahaziah walk on his wonted pavement! The Lord hath laid a trap for him, whereinto, while he thinks least, he falls irrecoverably. No place is safe for the man that is at variance with God.

The body of Ahaziah was not more sick than his soul was graceless. None but chance was his enemy; none but the god of Ekron must be his friend. He looks not up to the omnipotent hand of divine justice for the disease, or of mercy for the remedy: an idol is his refuge; whether for cure or intelligence.

We hear not till now of Baal-zebub. This new god of flies is, perhaps, of his making, who now is a suitor to his own erection. All these heathen deities were but a devil, with change of appellations: the influence of that evil spirit deluded those miserable clients; else, there was no fly so impotent, as that outside of the god of Ekron. Who.

would think, that any Israelite could so far dote on a stock, a fiend?

Time gathered much credit to this idol; insomuch as the Jews afterwards styled Beel-zebub the prince of all the regions of darkness. Ahaziah is the first that brings his oracle in request and pays him the tribute of his devotion. He sends messengers, and says, 'Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease.'

The message was either idle or wicked: idle, if he sent it to a stock; if to a devil, both idle and wicked. What can the most intelligent spirits know of future things, but what they see either in their causes, or in the light of participation? What a madness was it in Ahaziah, to seek to the postern, while the fore-gate stood open! Could those evil spirits truly foretell events no way pre-existent, yet they might not, without sin, be consulted. The evil of their nature debars all the benefits of their information. If not as intelligencers, much less may they be sought to as gods. Who cannot blush, to hear and see, that even the very evangelical Israel should yield pilgrims to the shrines of darkness? How many, after this clear light of the Gospel, in their losses, in their sicknesses, send to these infernal oracles; and damn themselves wilfully in a vain curiosity!

The message of the jealous God intercepts them with a just disdain, as here by Elijah, 'Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' What can be a greater disparagement to the true God, than to be neglected; than to stand aside, and see us make love to a hellish rival? Were there no God in Israel, in heaven, what could we do other? what worse?

This affront, of whatever kind, Ahaziah cannot escape without a revenge; 'Therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.' It is a high indignity to the true God, not to be sought to in our necessities; but so to be cashiered from our devotions, as to have a false god thrust in his room, is such a scorn, as it is well if it can escape with one death.

Let now the famous god of Ekron take off that brand of feared mortality, which the living God hath set on Ahaziah. Let Baal-zebub make good some better news to his distressed suppliant. Rather the king of Israel is himself, without his repentance, hasting to Baal-zebub.

This errand is soon done. The messengers are returned, ere they go. Not a little were they amazed, to hear their secret message from another's mouth; neither could choose but think, 'He, that can tell what Ahaziah said, what he thought, can foretell how he shall speed: we have met with a greater god than we went to seek: what need we inquire for another answer?' With this conceit, with this report, they return to their sick lord; and astonish him with so short, so sad a relation.

No marvel, if the king inquired curiously of the habit and fashion of the man that could know this; that durst say this. They describe him a man whether of a hairy skin, or of rough, coarse, careless attire; thus drest, thus girded. Ahaziah readily apprehends it to be Elijah, the old friend of his father Ahab, of his mother Jezebel. More than once had he seen him, an unwelcome guest, in the court of Israel. The times had been such, that the prophet could not, at once, speak true and please. Nothing but reproofs and menaces sounded from the mouth of Elijah. Micaiah and he were still as welcome to the eyes of that guilty prince, as the Syrian arrow was into his flesh. Too well therefore had Ahaziah noted that querulous seer; and now is not a little troubled, to see himself, in succession, haunted with that bold and ill-boding spirit.

Behold the true son of Jezebel: the anguish of his disease, the expectation of death, cannot take off the edge of his persecution of Elijah. It is against his will, that his death-bed is not bloody. Had Ahaziah meant any other than a cruel violence to Elijah, he had sent a peaceable messenger, to call him to the court; he had not sent a captain, with a band of soldiers, to fetch him. The instruments which he useth carry revenge in their face.

If he had not thought Elijah more than a man, what needed a band of fifty to apprehend one? and if he did

think him such, why would he send to apprehend him by fifty? Surely, Ahaziah knew of old how miraculous a prophet Elijah was; what power that man had over all their base deities; what command of the elements, of the heavens; and yet he sends to attach him. It is a strange thing, to see how wilfully godless men strive against the stream of their own hearts; hating that, which they know good; fighting against that, which they know divine.

What a gross disagreement is in the message of this Israelitish captain; 'Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down!' If he were a man of God, how hath he offended? And if he have justly offended the anointed of God, how is he a man of God? And if he be a man of God, and have not offended, why should he come down to punishment? Here is a kind confession, with a false heart, with bloody hands. The world is full of those windy courtesies, real cruelties. Deadly malice lurks under fair compliments; and, while it flatters, killeth.

The prophet hides not himself from the pursuit of Ahaziah: rather, he sits where he may be most conspicuous, on the top of a hill. This band knows well where to find him; and climbs up, in the sight of Elijah, for his arrest. The steepness of the ascent, when they drew near to the highest reach, yielded a convenience, both of respiration and parley: thence doth the captain imperiously call down the prophet.

Who would not tremble at the dreadful answer of Elijah; 'If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty?' What shall we say? That a prophet is revengeful? that soldiers suffer, while a prophet strikes? that a prince's command is answered with imprecation; words, with fire? that an unarmed seer should kill one-and-fifty at a blow? There are few tracks of Elijah, that are ordinary, and fit for common feet. His actions are more for wonder than for precedent. Not in his own defence would the prophet have been the death of so many; if God had not, by a peculiar instinct, made him an instrument of this just vengeance. The divine justice finds it meet to do this, for the terror of Israel; that he might teach them,

what it was to contemn, to persecute a prophet; that they might learn to fear him whom they had forsaken, and confess that Heaven was sensible of their insolencies and impieties.

If not as visibly, yet as certainly, doth God punish the violations of his ordinances, the affronts offered to his messengers, still and ever. Not ever with the same speed; sometimes, the punishment overtakes the act; sometimes, dogs it afar off, and seizeth on the offender, when his crime is forgotten: here, no sooner is the word out of Elijah's mouth, than the fire is out of heaven.

Oh the wonderful power of a prophet! There sits Elijah, in his coarse mantle, on the top of the hill, and commands the heavens, and they obey him; 'Let fire fall down from heaven.' He needs no more, but say what he would have done: the fire falls down, as before on the sacrifice in Carmel, so now on the soldiers of Ahaziah.

What is man in the hands of his Maker? One flash of lightning hath consumed this one-and-fifty. And if all the hosts of Israel, yea of the world, had been in their rooms, there had needed no other force. What madness is it, for him, whose breath is in his nostrils, to contend with the Almighty!

The time was, when two zealous disciples would fain have imitated this fiery revenge of Elijah, and were repelled with a check. The very place puts them in mind of the judgment: not far from Samaria was this done by Elijah, and wished to be done by his disciples. So churlish a rejection of a Saviour seemed no less heinous, than the endeavor of apprehending a prophet; 'Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias did?' The world yielded but one Elias: that, which was zeal in him, might be fury in another: the least variation of circumstance may make an example dangerous: presently therefore do they hear; 'Ye know not of what spirit ye are.' It is the calling that varies the spirit: Elijah was God's minister for the execution of so severe a judgment: they were but the servants of their own impotent anger. There was fire in their breasts which God never kindled: far was

it from the Saviour of men, to second their earthly fire with his heavenly. He came, indeed, to send fire on earth; but to warm, not to burn; and if to burn, not the persons of men, but their corruptions. How much more safe is it for us, to follow the meek Prophet of the New Testament, than that fervent prophet of the Old! Let the matter of our prayers be the sweet dews of mercy, not the fires of vengeance.

Would not any man have thought Ahaziah sufficiently warned by so terrible a judgment? Could he choose but say, 'It is no meddling with a man that can speak lightning and death: what he hath said concerning me is too well approved, by what he hath done to my messengers: God's hand is with him; mine shall not be against him?' Yet now, behold, the rage of Ahaziah is so much the more kindled by this fire from heaven; and a more resolute captain, with a second band, is sent to fetch Elijah to death.

This man is in haste; and commands not only his descent, but his speed; 'Come down quickly.' The charge implies a threat! Elijah must look for force, if he yield not. There needs no other weapon for defence, for offence, than the same tongue, the same breath. God hath fire enough for all the troops of Ahaziah. Immediately doth a sudden flame break out of heaven, and consume this forward leader and his bold followers. It is a just presage and desert of ruin, not to be warned: worthily are they made examples that will not take them.

What marble or flint is harder than a wicked heart? As if Ahaziah would despitefully spit in the face of heaven, and wrestle a fall with the Almighty, he will needs yet again set a third captain on so desperate an employment.

How hot a service must this commander needs think himself put on! Who can but pity his straits? There is death before him, death behind him. If he go not, the king's wrath is the messenger of death; if he go, the prophet's tongue is the executioner of death. Many a hard task will follow the service of a prince, wedded to his passion, divorced from God.

Unwillingly, doubtless, and fearfully, doth this cap-

tain climb up the hill, to scale that impregnable fort: but now, when he comes near to the assault, the battery that he lays to it is his prayers: his surest fight is on his knees: 'He went up, and came, and fell upon his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.' He confesses the judgment that befell his predecessors. The monuments of their destruction were in his eye, and the terror of it in his heart: of an enemy therefore he is become a suppliant; and sues, not so much for the prophet's yieldance, as for his own life.

This was the way to offer violence to the prophet of God, to the God of that prophet, even humble supplications. We must deprecate that evil which we would avoid. If we would force blessings, we must intreat them. There is nothing to be gotten from God, by strong hand; any thing, by suit. The life of the captain is preserved: Elijah is by the angel commanded to go down with him speedily, fearlessly.

The prophet casts not with himself; 'What safety can there be in this journey? I shall put myself into the hands of rude soldiers, and by them into the hands of an enraged king. If he did not eagerly thirst after my blood, he had never sought it with so much loss.' But, so soon as he had a charge from the angel, he walks down resolutely; and, as it were, dares the dangers of so great a hostility. He knew, that the same God, who had fought for him on the hill, would not leave him in the valley. He knew, that the angel which bade him go, was guard enough against a world of enemies. Faith knows not how to fear; and can as easily contemn the suggestion of perils, as infidelity can raise them.

The prophet looks boldly on the court, which doubtless was not a little disaffected to him; and comes confidently into the bed-chamber of Ahaziah; and sticks not to speak over the same words to his head, which he had sent him not long since by his first messengers. Not one syllable will the prophet abate of his errand. It is not for a herald of heaven to be out of countenance; or to mince aught of the most killing messages of his God.

Whether the unexpected confidence, both of the man and of the speech, amazed the sick king of Israel; or, whether the fear of some present judgment, wherewith he might suspect Elijah to come armed, on any act of violence that should be offered, overawed him; or, whether now, at last, on the sight and hearing of this man of God, the king's heart began to relent, and check itself for that sin for which he was justly reproved; I know not: but sure I am the prophet goes away untouched. Neither the furious purposes of Ahaziah, nor the exasperations of a Jezebel, can hurt that prophet whom God hath intended to a fiery chariot.

The hearts of kings are not their own. Subjects are not so much in their hands, as they are in their Maker's. How easily can God tame the fierceness of any creature; and, in the midst of their most heady career, stop them on the sudden, and fetch them on the knees of their humble submission! It is good trusting God with the events of his own commands; who can, at pleasure, either avert evils, or improve them to good.

According to the word of the prophet, Ahaziah dies. Not two whole years doth he sit in the throne of Israel; which he now must yield, in the want of children, to his brother. Wickedness shortens his reign. He had too much of Ahab and Jezebel to expect the blessing, either of length or prosperity of government. As always in the other, so ofttimes in this world, doth God testify his anger to wicked men. Some live long, that they may aggravate their judgment; others die soon, that they may hasten it. —2 Kings i.

THE RAPTURE OF ELIJAH.

Long and happily hath Elijah fought the wars of his God; and now, after his noble and glorious victories, God will send him a chariot of triumph.

Not suddenly would God snatch away his prophet, without warning, without expectation; but acquaints him beforehand with the determination of his glory.

How full of heavenly joy was the soul of Elijah, while he foreknew and looked for this instant happiness! With what contempt did he cast his eyes on that earth which

he was now presently to leave! With what ravishment of an inward pleasure did he look on that heaven which he was to enjoy!

For a meet farewell to the earth, Elijah will go visit the schools of the prophets before his departure. These were in his way: of any part of the earth, they were nearest unto heaven. In a holy progress therefore he walks his last round; from Gilgal near Jordan, to Bethel; from Bethel, to Jericho; from Jericho, to Jordan again.

In all these sacred colleges of divines, he meant to leave the legacy of his love, counsel, confirmation, blessing. How happy a thing it is, while we are on earth, to improve our time and gifts to the best behoof of God's church; and after the assurance of our own blessedness, to help others to the same heaven!

But, O God, who can but wonder at the course of thy wise and powerful administrations? Even in the midst of the degeneration and idolatries of Israel, hast thou reserved to thyself whole societies of holy prophets; and, out of those sinful and revolted tribes, hast raised the two great miracles of prophets, Elijah and Elisha, in an immediate succession. Judah itself, under a religious Jehoshaphat, yielded not so eminent and clearly illuminated spirits. The mercy of our provident God will neither be confined nor excluded; neither confined to the places of public profession, nor excluded from the depraved congregations of his own people. Where he hath loved, he cannot easily be estranged: rather, where sin abounds, his grace aboundeth much more; and raiseth so much stronger helps as he sees the dangers greater.

Happy was Elisha in the attendance of so gracious a master; and the more happy, that he knows it. Fain would Elijah shake him off at Gilgal; if not there, at Bethel; if not yet there, at Jericho. A private message, on which Elijah must go alone, is pretended, from the Lord. Whether shall we say the prophet did this, for the trial of the constant affection of his careful and diligent servant; or, that it was concealed from Elijah, that his departure was revealed to Elisha? Perhaps, he, that knew of his own reception into heaven, did not know what witnesses would be allowed that miraculous act;

and now his humble modesty affected a silent and unnoted passage.

Even Elisha knew something that was hid from his master, now on the threshold of heaven. No mere creature was ever made of the whole counsel of the Highest. Some things have been disclosed to babes and novices, that have been closed up to the most wise and judicious. In natural speculations, the greater wit and deeper judgment still carry it; but in the revelations of God, the favor of his choice sways all, not the power of our apprehension.

The master may both command and entreat his servant's stay. Elisha must be pardoned this holy and zealous disobedience; 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.' His master may be withdrawn from him; he will not be withdrawn from his master. He knew that the blessing was at the parting; and, if he had diligently attended all his life, and now slacked in the last act, he had lost the reward of his service. The evening praises the day, and the chief grace of the theatre is in the last scene; 'Be faithful to the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

That Elijah should be translated, and what day he should be translated, God would have no secret. The sons of the prophets at Bethel, at Jericho, both know it, and ask Elisha if he knew it not; 'Knowest thou, that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head this day?' and he answered, 'Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.'

How familiarly do these prophets interknow one another! How kindly do they communicate their visions! Seldom ever was any knowledge given to keep, but to impart: the grace of this rich jewel is lost in concealment.

The removal of an Elijah is so important a business, that it is not fit to be done without noise. Many shall have their share in his loss: he must be missed on the sudden: it was meet therefore, that the world should know, his rapture should be divine and glorious.

I do not find, where the day of any natural death is notified to so many. By how much more wonder there was in this assumption, by so much more shall it be fore-

revealed. It is enough for ordinary occurrents to be known by their event: supernatural things have need of premonition, that men's hearts may be both prepared for their receipt, and confirmed in their certainty.

Thrice was Elisha entreated, thrice hath he denied, to stay behind his now departing master; on whom both his eyes and his thoughts are so fixed, that he cannot give allowance, so much as to the interpellation of a question of his fellow prophets.

Together, therefore, are this wonderful pair come to the last stage of their separation, the banks of Jordan.

Those, that were not admitted to be attendants of their journey, yet will not be debarred from being spectators of so marvellous an issue. 'Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off.' I marvel there were no more. How could any son of the prophets stay within the college walls that day; when he knew what was meant to Elijah? Perhaps, though they knew that to be the prophet's last day, yet they might think his disparition should be sudden and insensible; besides, they found how much he affected secresy in this intended departure: yet the fifty prophets of Jericho will make proof of their eyes; and, with much intention, assay who shall have the last sight of Elijah.

Miracles are not purposed to silence and obscurity. God will not work wonders without witnesses. Since he doth them on purpose to win glory to his name, his end were frustrate without their notice. Even so, O Saviour, when thou hadst raised thyself from the dead, thou wouldest be seen of more than five hundred brethren at once; and when thou wouldest raise up thy glorified body from earth into heaven, thou didst not ascend from some close valley, but from the mount of Olives; not in the night, not alone, but in the clear day, in the view of many eyes; which were so fixed on that point of heaven, that they could scarce be removed by the check of angels.

Jordan must be crossed by Elijah in his way to heaven. There must be a meet parallel betwixt the two great prophets that shall meet Christ on Tabor; Moses and Elias. Both received visions on Horeb: to both God appeared there, in fire and other forms of terror: both were

sent to kings; one, to Pharaoh; the other, to Ahab: both prepared miraculous tables; the one, of quails and manna, in the desert; the other, of meal and oil, in Sarepta: both opened heaven; the one, for that nourishing dew; the other, for those refreshing showers: both revenged idolatries with the sword; the one, on the worshippers of the golden calf; the other, on the four hundred Baalites: both quenched the drought of Israel; the one, out of the rock; the other, out of the cloud: both divided the waters; the one, of the Red Sea; the other, of Jordan: both of them are forewarned of their departure: both must be fetched away beyond Jordan; the body of Elijah is translated; the body of Moses is hid: what Moses doth by his rod, Elijah doth by his mantle: with that, he smites the waters, and they, as fearing the divine power which wrought with the prophet, run away from him, and stand on heaps, leaving the dry channel for the passage of those awful feet. It is not long since he mulcted them with a general exsiccation: now, he only bids them stand aside, and give way to his last walk; that he might with dry feet mount up into the celestial chariot.

The waters do not now first obey him. They know that mantle of old; which hath oft given laws to their falling, rising, standing. They are passed over; and now, when Elijah finds himself treading on his last earth, he proffers a munificent boon to his faithful servant; 'Ask what I shall do for thee before I am taken from thee.'

I do not hear him say, 'Ask of me, when I am gone; in my glorified condition, I shall be more able to bestead thee;' but, 'Ask before I go.' We have a communion with the saints departed; not a commerce. When they are enabled to do more for us, they are less apt to be solicited by us. It is a safe suing, where we are sure that we are heard.

Had not Elijah received a peculiar instinct for this proffer, he had not been thus liberal. It were presumption to be bountiful on another's cost, without leave of the owner. The mercy of our good God allows his favorites, not only to receive, but to give; not only to receive for themselves, but to convey blessings to others. What can that man want that is befriended of the faithful?

Elisha needs not go far to seek for a suit. It was in his heart, in his mouth; 'Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.' Every prophet must be a son to Elijah; but Elisha would be his heir; and crave the happy right of his primogeniture, the double share to his brethren. It was not wealth, nor safety, nor ease, nor honor, that Elisha cares for. The world lies open before him; he may take his choice: the rest he contemneth; nothing will serve him, but a large measure of his master's spirit.

No carnal thought was guilty of this sacred ambition. Affectation of eminence was too base a conceit, to fall into that man of God. He saw, that the times needed strong convictions; he saw, that he could not otherwise wield the succession to such a master; therefore he sues for a double portion of spirit: the spirit of prophecy, to foreknow; the spirit of power, to work. We cannot be too covetous, too ambitious, of spiritual gifts; such especially as may enable us to win most advantage to God in our vocations. Our wishes are the true touchstone of our estate. Such as we wish to be, we are. Worldly hearts affect earthly things; spiritual, divine. We cannot better know what we are indeed, than by what we would be.

Elijah acknowledges the difficulty, and promises the grant of so great a request; suspended yet on the condition of Elisha's eyesight: 'If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be.' What are the eyes to the furniture of the soul? What power is there in those visive beams, to draw down a double portion of Elijah's spirit? God doth not always look at efficacy and merit in the conditions of our actions, but at the freedom of his own appointments. The eye was only to be employed as the servant of the heart, that the desires might be so much more intended with the sight. Vehemence is the way to speed, both in earth and in heaven. If but the eyelids of Elisha fall, if his thoughts slacken, his hopes are dashed. There must be fixedness and vigilance in those that desire double grace.

Elijah was going on and talking, when the chariot of Heaven came to fetch him. Surely, had not that conference been needful and divine, it had given way to meditation; and Elijah had been taken up, rather from his

knees, than from his feet. There can be no better posture or state, for the messenger of our dissolution to find us in, than in a diligent prosecution of our calling. The busy attendance of our holy vocation is no less pleasing to God, than an immediate devotion. 'Happy is the servant, whom the master, when he comes, shall find so doing.'

Oh the singular glory of Elijah! What mortal creature ever had this honor, to be visibly fetched by the angels of God to his heaven? Every soul of the elect is attended and carried to blessedness by those invisible messengers; but what flesh and blood was ever graced with such a convoy?

There are three bodily inhabitants of heaven, Enoch, Elijah, our Saviour Christ: the first, before the Law; the second, under the Law; the third, under the Gospel: all three, in a several form of translation. Our blessed Saviour raised himself to and above the heavens by his own immediate power: he ascended as the Son; they, as servants: he, as God; they, as creatures. Elijah ascended by the visible ministry of angels; Enoch, insensibly. Wherefore, O God, hast thou done thus, but to give us a taste of what shall be? to let us see, that heaven was never shut to the faithful? to give us assurance of the future glorification of this mortal and corruptible part? Even thus, O Saviour, when thou shalt descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God, we, that are alive and remain, shall be caught up, together with the raised bodies of thy saints, into the clouds, to meet thee in the air, to dwell with thee in glory.

Many forms have those celestial spirits taken to themselves, in their apparitions to men; but, of all other, most often hath the Almighty made his messengers 'a flame of fire:' never more properly than here. How had the Spirit of God kindled the hot fires of zeal in the breast of Elijah! How had this prophet thrice commanded fire from heaven to earth! How fitly now, at last, do these seraphical fires carry him from earth to heaven!

What do we see in this rapture of Elijah, but violence:

and terror, whirlwind and fire; two of those fearful representations which the prophet had in the rock of Horeb? Never any man entered into glory with ease. Even the most favorable change hath some equivalency to a natural dissolution. Although, doubtless, to Elijah, this fire had a lightsomeness and resplendence, not terror; this whirlwind had speed, not violence. Thus hast thou, O Saviour, bidden us, when the elements shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be flaming about our ears, to lift up our heads with joy, because our redemption draweth nigh. Come death, come fire, come whirlwind; they are worthy to be welcome, that shall carry us to immortality.

This arreption was sudden; yet Elisha sees both the chariot, and the horses, and the ascent; and cries to his now changed master, between heaven and earth, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.' Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, hath yielded this title to Elijah; the natural father of Elisha, to the spiritual. Neither of them may be neglected; but, after the yoke of oxen killed at the farewell, we hear of no more greetings, no more bewailings, of his bodily parent; and now, that Elijah is taken from him, he cries out like a distressed orphan, 'My father, my father;' and when he hath lost the sight of him, he rends his clothes in pieces, according to the fashion of the most passionate mourners.

That Elisha sees his master half way in heaven, cannot take away the sorrow of his loss. The departure of a faithful prophet of God is worthy of our lamentation.

Neither is it private affection that must sway our grief, but respects to the public: Elisha says, not only, 'My father,' but 'the chariot and horsemen of Israel.' That we have foregone a father should not so much trouble us, as that Israel hath lost his guard. Certainly the view of this heavenly chariot and horses that came for Elijah, puts Elisha in mind of that chariot and horsemen which Elijah was to Israel. These were God's chariots; Elijah was theirs. God's chariot and theirs are, on the same wheels, mounted into heaven. No forces are so strong as the spiritual. The prayers of an Elijah are more powerful than all the armies of flesh. The first thing that this seer discerns,

after the separation of his master, is, the nakedness of Israel in his loss. If we muster soldiers, and lose zealous prophets, it is but a woful exchange.

Elijah's mantle falls from him in the rising. There was no use of that, whither he was going; there was, whence he was taken. Elisha justly takes up this dear monument of his glorified master; a good supply for his rent garments: this was it, which, in presage of his future right, Elijah invested him withal, on the first sight, when he was ploughing with the twelve yoke of oxen; now it falls from heaven to his possession. I do not see him adore so precious a relic: I see him take it up; cast it about him.

Pensive and masterless doth he now come back to the banks of Jordan; whose stream he must pass in his return to the schools of the prophets. Erewhile, he saw what way that river gave to the mantle of Elijah. He knew that power was not in the cloth, but in the spirit of him that wore it; to try therefore, whether he were no less the heir of that spirit than of that garment, 'He took the mantle of Elijah, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' Elisha doth not expostulate and challenge, but pray. As if he had said; 'Lord God, it was thy promise to me by my departed master, that, if I should see him in his last passage, a double portion of his spirit should be on me. I followed him with my eyes, in that fire and whirlwind; now therefore, O God, make good thy gracious word to thy servant: show some token on me for good: make this the first proof of the miraculous power wherewith thou shalt endue me: let Jordan give the same way to me as it gave to my master.' Immediately, the stream, as acknowledging the same mantle, though in another hand, divides itself, and yields passage to the successor of Elijah.

The fifty sons of the prophets, having been afar off witnesses of these admirable events, do well see, that Elijah, though translated in body, hath yet left his spirit behind him. They meet Elisha, and bow themselves to the ground before him: It was not the outside of Elijah which they had wont to stoop unto with so much veneration: it was his spirit; which, since they now find in another subject,

they entertain with equal reverence. No envy, no emulation, raiseth up their stomachs against Elijah's servant; but, where they see eminent graces, they are willingly prostrate. Those, that are truly gracious, do not less rejoice in the riches of others' gifts, than humbly undervalue their own. These men were trained up in the schools of the prophets; Elisha, at the plough and cart; yet now they stand not on terms of their worth and his meanness, but meekly fall down before him whom God will honor. It is not to be regarded, who the man is, but whom God would make him. The more unlikely the means is, the more is the glory of the workman. It is the praise of a holy ingenuity, to magnify the graces of God, wherever it finds them.

These young prophets are no less full of zeal than reverence; zeal to Elijah, reverence to Elisha. They see Elijah carried up in the air; they knew this was not the first time of his supernatural removal; imagining it therefore possible, that the Spirit of God had cast him on some remote mountain or valley, they proffer the labor of their servants to seek him. In some things, even professed seers are blind: Could they think God would send such a chariot and horses for a less voyage than heaven?

Elisha, knowing his master beyond all the sphere of mortality, forbids them. Good-will makes them unmannerly: their importunity urges him till he is ashamed: not his approbation, but their vehemence, carries at last a condescent: else, he might perhaps have seemed enviously unwilling to fetch back so admired a master; and loath to forego that mantle. Some things may be yielded, for the redeeming of our own vexation, and avoidance of others' misconstruction, which, out of true judgment, we see no cause to affect.

The messengers, tired with three days' search, turn back as wise as they went. Some men are best satisfied, when they have wearied themselves in their own ways: nothing will teach them wit but disappointments. Their painful error leads them to a right conceit of Elijah's happier transportation.

Those that would find Elijah, let them aspire to the heavenly paradise. Let them follow the high steps of

his sincere faithfulness, strong patience, undaunted courage, fervent zeal. Shortly, let them walk in the ways of his holy and constant obedience: at last, God shall send the fiery chariot of death, to fetch them up to that heaven of heavens, where they shall triumph in everlasting joys.—2 Kings ii.

ELISHA HEALING THE WATERS, CURSING THE CHILDREN, RELIEVING THE KINGS.

It is good making use of a prophet while we have him. Elisha stayed some while at Jericho: the citizens resort to him with a common suit: their structure was not more pleasant, than their waters unwholesome; and their soil, by those corrupt waters: they sue to Elisha for the remedy.

Why had they not, all this while, made their moan to Elijah? Was it that they were more awed with his greater austerity? Or was it, that they met not with so fit an opportunity of his commoration amongst them? It was told them, what power Elisha had exercised on the waters of Jordan; and now they ply him for theirs. Examples of beneficence easily move us to a request and expectation of favors.

What ailed the waters of Jericho? Surely, originally they were not ill affected. No men could be so foolish, as to build a city where neither earth nor water were useful. Mere prospect could not carry men to the neglect of health and profit. Hiel, the Bethelite, would never have re-edified it with danger of a curse, so lately as in the days of Ahab, if it had been of old notorious for so foul an annoyance. Not therefore the ancient malediction of Joshua, not the neighborhood of that noisome lake of Sodom, was guilty of this disease of the soil and waters, but the late sins of the inhabitants: 'He turneth the rivers into a wilderness, and water springs into a dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.' How oft have we seen the same field both full and famishing! How oft, the same waters both safe, and by some irruption or new tincture, hurtful! Howsoever natural causes may concur,

heaven, and earth, and air, and waters, follow the temper of our souls, of our lives; and are therefore indisposed, because we are so.

Jericho began now to make itself capable of a better state, since it was now become a receptacle of prophets. Elisha is willing to gratify his hosts. It is reason that any place should fare the better for the presence of divines.

The medicine is more strange than the disease; 'Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein.' Why a cruse? why new? why salt in that new cruse? How should salt make water potable? Or, if there were any such virtue in it, what could a cruseful do to a whole current? Or, if that measure were sufficient, what was the age of the cruse to the force of the salt? Yet Elisha calls for salt in a new cruse. God, who wrought this by his prophet, is a free agent. As he will not bind his power to means, so will he by his power bind unlikely means to perform his will. Natural properties have no place in miraculous works. No less easy is it for God, to work by contrary, than subordinate powers.

The prophet doth not cast the salt into the channel, but into the spring, of the waters. If the fountain be redressed, the streams cannot be faulty; as contrarily, the purity and soundness of the stream avails nothing, to the redress of the fountain. Reformation must begin at the well-head of the abuse. The order of being is a good guide to the method of amending. Virtue doth not run backward. Had Elisha cast the salt into the brooks and ditches, the remedy must have striven against the stream to reach up to the spring: now it is but one labor, to cure the fountain. Our heart is a well of bitter and venomous water; our actions are the streams: in vain shall we cleanse our hands while our hearts are evil.

The cruse and the salt must be their own; the act must be his; the power, God's: he cast the salt into the spring, and said; 'Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barrenness.' Far was it from Elisha to challenge aught to himself. Before, when he should divide the waters of Jordan, he did not say, 'Where is the power of

Elisha?' but, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' And now, when he should cure the waters of Jericho, he says not, 'Thus saith Elisha,' but, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters.' How careful is the man of God, that no part of God's glory should stick to his own fingers! Jericho shall know to whom they owe the blessing; that they may duly return the thanks. Elisha professes he can do no more of himself, than that salt, than that cruse: only God shall work by him, by it; and whatever that Almighty hand undertakes cannot fail, yea is already done. Neither doth he say, 'I will heal,' but, 'I have healed.' Even so, O God, if thou cast into the fountain of our hearts but one cruseful of the salt of thy Spirit, we are whole: no thought can pass between the receipt and the remedy.

As the general visitor of the schools of the prophets, Elisha passeth from Jericho to that other college at Bethel. Bethel was a place of strange composition: there were, at once, the golden calf of Jeroboam, and the school of God: true religion and idolatry found a free harbor within those walls. I do not marvel that God's prophets would plant there: there was the most need of their presence, where they found the spring-head of corruption: physicians are of most use where diseases do abound.

'As he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, thou bald-head; Go up, thou bald-head.' Even the very boys of Bethel have learned to scoff at a prophet: the spite of their idolatrous parents is easily propagated. Children are such as their institution. Infancy is led altogether by imitation: it hath neither words nor actions, but infused by others: if it have good or ill language, it is but borrowed; and the shame or thank is due to those that lent it them.

What was it that these ill-taught children upbraided to the prophet, but a slight natural defect, not worthy the name of a blemish, the want of a little hair? at the best, a comely excrement, no part of the body. Had there been deformity in that smoothness of the head, which some great wits have honored with praises, a faultless and remediless eyesore had been no fit matter for a taunt.

How small occasions will be taken to disgrace a prophet! If they could have said aught worse, Elisha had not heard of this. God had crowned that head with honor, which the Bethelitish children loaded with scorn.

Who would have thought the rude terms of waggish boys worthy of any thing but neglect? Elisha looks at them with severe brows, and, like the heir of him that called down fire on the two captains and their fifties, curses them in the name of the Lord. Two she-bears out of the wood hasten to be his executioners, and tear two-and-forty of them in pieces. O fearful example of divine justice! This was not the revenge of an angry prophet: it was the punishment of a righteous judge. God and his seer looked through these children, at the parents, at all Israel. He would punish the parents' misnurturing their children to the contemptuous usage of a prophet, with the death of those children which they had mistaught: he would teach Israel, what it was to misuse a prophet: and, if he would not endure these contumelies unrevenged in the mouths of children, what vengeance was enough for aged persecutors?

Doubtless, some of the children escaped, to tell the news of their fellows. What lamentation do we think there was in the streets of Bethel! How did the distressed mothers wring their hands for this woful orbation! And now, when they came forth to fetch the remnants of their own flesh, what a sad spectacle it was to find the fields strewed with those mangled carcasses! It is an unprofitable sorrow that follows a judgment. Had these parents been as careful, to train up their children in good discipline and to correct their disorders, as they are now passionate in bemoaning their loss, this slaughter had never been. In vain do we look for good of those children, whose education we have neglected: in vain do we grieve for those miscarriages, which our care might have prevented.

Elisha knew the success, yet doth he not balk the city of Bethel. Do we not wonder, that the furious impatience of those parents, whom the curse of Elisha robbed of their children, did not break forth to some malicious practice against the prophet? Would we not think the

prophet might misdoubt some hard measure, from those exasperated citizens? There lay his way. He follows God, without fear of men; as well knowing, that either they durst not or they could not act violence. They knew there were bears in the wood and fires in heaven; and, if their malice would have ventured above their courage, they could have no more power over Elisha in the streets, than those hungry beasts had in the way. Whither dare not a prophet go when God calls him?

Having visited the schools of the prophets, Elisha retires to mount Carmel; and, after some holy solitariness, returns to the city of Samaria. He can never be a profitable seer, that is either always or never alone. Carmel shall fit him for Samaria; contemplation, for action. That mother city of Israel must needs afford him most work.

Yet is the throne of Ahaziah succeeded by a brother less ill than himself; than the parents of both. Ahab's impiety hath not a perfect heir of Jehoram. That son of his hates his Baal, though he keeps his calves. Even into the most wicked families it pleaseth God to cast his most powerful restraints, that all are not equally vicious. It is no news, to see lewd men make scruple of some sins. The world were not to live in, if all sins were affected by all. It is no thank to Ahab and Jezebel, that their son is no Baalite. As no good is traduced from parents, so not all evil. There is an Almighty hand, that stops the foul current of nature at his pleasure. No idolater can say, that his child shall not be a convert.

The affinity betwixt the houses of Israel and Judah holds good in succession. Jehoram inherits the friendship, the aid, of Jehoshaphat; whose counsel, as is most likely, had cured him of that Baalism.

It was a good war whereto he solicits the good king of Judah. The king of Moab, who had been an ancient tributary from the days of David, falls now from his homage; and refuses to pay his hundred lambs, a hundred thousand rams with fleeces, to the king of Israel. The backs of Israel can ill miss the wool of Moab: they will put on iron to recover their cloth.

Jehoshaphat had been once well chid, well frighted,

for joining with Ahab against Aram; yet doth he not stick now again to come into the field with Jehoram against Moab. The cause is more favorable, less dangerous: Baal is cast down: the images of the false gods are gone, though the false images of the true God stand still: beside, this rebellious Moab had joined with the Syrians formerly against Judah, so as Jehoshaphat is interested in the revenge.

After resolution of the end, wisely do these kings deliberate of the way. It is agreed to pass through Edom. That kingdom was annexed to the crown of Judah: well might Jehoshaphat make bold with his own. It was, it seems, a march far about in the measure of the way, but nearest to their purpose: the assault would be thus more easy, if the passage were more tedious.

The three kings, of Israel, Judah, Edom, together with their armies, are on foot. They are no sooner come into the parching wilds of Edom, than they are ready to die for thirst. If the channels were far off, yet the waters were further: the scorching beams of the sun have dried them up, and have left those rivers more fit for walk than entertainment. What are the greatest monarchs of the world, if they want but water to their mouths? What can their crowns, and plumes, and rich arms, avail them, when they are abridged but of that which is the drink of beasts?

With dry tongues and lips do they now confer of their common misery. Jehoram deplores the calamity into which they were fallen; but Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet. Every man can bewail a misery: every man cannot find the way out of it. Still yet I hear good Jehoshaphat speak too late. He should have inquired for a prophet ere he had gone forth; so had he avoided these straits. Not to consult at all with God, is Jehoram's sin; to consult late, is Jehoshaphat's: the former is atheistic carelessness; the latter, forgetful oversight. The best man may slacken good duties: the worst contemns them.

Not without some specialty from God doth Elisha follow the camp; else, that had been no element for a prophet. Little did the good king of Judah think, that God

was so near him. Purposely was this holy seer sent, for the succour of Jehoshaphat and his faithful followers, when they were so far from dreaming of their delivery, that they knew not of a danger. It would be wide with the best men, if the eye of Divine Providence were not open on them, when the eye of their care is shut towards it.

How well did Elisha in the wars! The strongest squadron of Israel was within that breast. All their armor of proof had not so much safety and protection as his mantle.

Though the king of Israel would take no notice of the prophet, yet one of his courtiers did; 'Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.' This follower of Jehoram knows Elisha by his own name, by his father's, by his master's. The court of Israel was profane and idolatrous enough, yet even there God's prophet had both knowledge and honor. His very service to Elijah was enough to win him reverence. It is better to be an attendant of some man, than to be attended by many. That he had poured water on Elijah's hands was insinuation enough, that he could pour out water for those three kings.

The three kings walk down, by the motion of Jehoshaphat, to the man of God. It was news, to see three kings going down to the servant of him who ran before the chariot of Ahab. Religion and necessity have both of them much power of humiliation; I know not whether more. Either zeal or need will make a prophet honored.

How sharply dares the man of God to chide his sovereign, the king of Israel! The liberty of the prophets was no less singular than their calling. He, that would borrow their tongue, must show their commission. As God reproved kings for their sakes, so did not they stick to reprove kings for his sake. Thus much freedom they must leave to their successors, that we may not spare the vices of them whose persons we must spare.

Justly is Jehoram turned off, to the prophets of his father, and the prophets of his mother. It is but right and equal, that those, which we have made the comfort and stay of our peace, should be the refuge of our extremity. If our prosperity have made the world our God, how

worthily shall our death-bed be choked with this exprobration!

Neither would the case bear an apology, nor the time an expostulation. Jehoram cannot excuse; he can complain. He finds that now three kings, three kingdoms, are at the mercy of one prophet: it was time for him to speak fair: nothing sounds from him, but lamentations and entreaties; 'Nay, for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.'

Jehoram hath so much grace, as to confess the impotency of those he had trusted, and the power of that God whom he had neglected: every sinner cannot see and acknowledge the hand of God in his sufferings. Already hath the distressed prince gained something by his misery: none complains so much as he; none feels so much as he: all the rest suffer for him, and therefore he suffers in them all.

The man of God, who well sees the insufficiency of Jehoram's humiliation, lays on yet more load; 'As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.'

Behold the double spirit of Elijah. The master was not more bold with the father, than the servant was with the son: Elisha was a subject, and a prophet: he must say that as a prophet, which he might not as a subject; as a prophet he would not have looked at him, whom as a subject he would have bowed to. It is one thing, when God speaks by him; another, when he speaks of himself. That it might well appear his dislike of sin stood with his honor of sovereignty, Jehoshaphat goes away with that respect which Jehoram missed. No less doth God, and his prophet, regard religious sincerity, than they abhor idolatry and profaneness.

What shall not be done for a Jehoshaphat? For his sake, shall those two other princes and their vast armies live and prevail. Edom and Israel, whether single or conjoined, had perished, by the drought of the desert, by the sword of Moab: one Jehoshaphat gives them both life and victory. It is in the power of one good man to oblige a world. We receive true, though insensible fa-

vors, from the presence of the righteous. Next to being good, it is happy to converse with them that are so: if we be not bettered by their example, we are blest by their protection.

Who wonders not, to hear a prophet call for a minstrel, in the midst of that mournful distress of Israel and Judah? Who would not have expected his charge of tears and prayers, rather than of music? How unseasonable are songs to a heavy heart! It was not for their ears, it was for his own bosom, that Elisha called for music; that his spirits, after their zealous agitation, might be sweetly composed, and put into a meet temper for receiving the calm visions of God. Perhaps it was some holy Levite, that followed the camp of Jehoshaphat, whose minstrelsy was required for so sacred a purpose. None but a quiet breast is capable of divine revelations. Nothing is more powerful to settle a troubled heart, than a melodious harmony. The Spirit of prophecy was not the more invited, the prophet's spirit was the better disposed, by pleasing sounds. The same God, that will reveal his will to the prophet, suggests this demand; 'Bring me a minstrel.' How many say thus, when they would put God from them! Profane mirth, wanton music, debauches the soul; and makes no less room for the unclean spirit, than spiritual melody for the divine.

No prophet had ever the Spirit at command. The hand of the minstrel can do nothing, without the hand of the Lord. While the music sounds in the ear, God speaks to the heart of Elisha; 'Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches; ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be full of water,' &c.

To see wind and rain in the height of that drought, would have seemed as wonderful as pleasing; but, to see abundance of water without wind or rain, was yet more miraculous. I know not how the sight of the means abates our admiration of the effect. Where no causes can be found out, we are forced to confess omnipotency. Elijah relieved Israel with water, but it was out of the clouds, and those clouds rose from the sea; but whence Elisha shall fetch it, is not more marvellous than secret.

All that evening, all that night, must the faith of Israel

and Judah be exercised with expectation. At the hour of the morning sacrifice, no sooner did the blood of that oblation gush forth, than the streams of waters gushed forth into their new channels, and filled the country with a refreshing moisture. Elijah fetched down his fire at the hour of the evening sacrifice: Elisha fetched up his water at the hour of the morning sacrifice. God gives respect to his own hours, for the encouragement of our observation. If his wisdom hath set us any peculiar times, we cannot keep them without a blessing. The devotions of all true Jews, all the world over, were in that hour combined: how seasonably doth the wisdom of God pick out that instant, wherein he might at once answer both Elisha's prophecy, and his people's prayers!

The prophet hath assured the kings, not of water only, but of victory. Moab hears of enemies, and is addressed to war. Their own error shall cut their throats: they rise soon enough to beguile themselves: the beams of the rising sun, glistering on those vaporous and unexpected waters, carried, in the eyes of some Moabites, a semblance of blood. A few eyes were enough to fill all ears with a false noise: the deceived sense miscarries the imagination; 'This is blood; the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.' Civil broils give just advantage to a common enemy: therefore must the camps be spoiled, because the kings have smitten each other. Those, that shall be deceived, are given over to credulity. The Moabites do not examine, either the conceit or the report; but fly in, confusedly, on the camp of Israel; whom they find, too late, to have no enemies but themselves. As if death would not have hastened enough to them, they come to fetch it; they come to challenge it: it seizeth on them unavoidably: they are smitten, their cities razed, their lands marred, their wells stopped, their trees felled; as if God meant to waste them but once.

No onsets are so furious, as the last assaults of the desperate. The king of Moab, now hopeless of recovery, would be glad to shut up with a pleasing revenge. With seven hundred resolute followers, he rushes into the battle, towards the king of Edom; as if he would bid death wel-

come, might he but carry with him that despited neighbor; and now, mad with the repulse, he returns; and, whether as angry with his destiny, or as barbarously affecting to win his cruel gods with so dear a sacrifice, he offers them, with his own hand, the blood of his eldest son, in the sight of Israel, and sends him up in smoke to those hellish deities. O prodigious act, whether of rage or of devotion! What a hand hath Satan over his miserable vassals! What marvel is it, to see men sacrifice their souls, in an unfelt oblation, to these plausible tempters, when their own flesh and blood hath not been spared? There is no tyrant to the prince of darkness.—2 Kings ii. iii.

ELISHA WITH THE SHUNAMITE.

The holy prophets under the Old Testament did not abhor the marriage-bed. They did not think themselves too pure for an institution of their Maker.

The distressed widow of one of the sons of the prophets comes to Elijah to bemoan her condition. Her husband is dead; and dead, in debt. Death hath no sooner seized on him, than her two sons, the remaining comfort of her life, are to be seized on by his creditors for bondmen. How thick did the miseries of this poor afflicted woman light on her! Her husband is lost; her estate clogged with debts; her children ready to be taken for slaves! Her husband was a religious and worthy man. He paid his debts to nature; he could not, to his creditors. They are cruel; and rake in the scarce-closed wound of her sorrow; passing an arrest worse than death on her sons. Widowhood, poverty, servitude, have conspired to make her perfectly miserable.

Virtue and goodness can pay no debts. The holiest man may be deep in arrearages, and break the bank; not through lavishness, and riot of expense (religion teaches us to moderate our hands, to spend within the proportion of our estate); but through either iniquity of times or evil casualties.

Ahab and Jezebel were lately in the throne. Who can marvel, that a prophet was in debt? It was well, that any good man might have his breath free, though his estate were not.

Wilfully to overlash our ability cannot stand with wisdom and good government; but no providence can guard us from crosses. Holiness is no more defence against debt, than against death. Grace can keep us from unthriftiness; not from want.

Whither doth the prophet's widow come to bewail her case, but to Elisha? Every one would not be sensible of her affliction; or if they would pity, yet could not relieve her; Elisha could do both. Into his ear doth she unload her griefs. It is no small point of wisdom, to know where to plant our lamentation; otherwise, instead of comfort, we may meet with scorn and insultation.

None can so freely compassionate the hard terms of a prophet, as an Elisha. He finds, that she is not querulously impatient; expressing her sorrow, without murmuring and discontentment; making a loving and honorable mention of that husband, who had left her distressed: readily therefore doth he incline to her succor; 'What shall I do for thee? Tell me what hast thou in the house?'

Elisha, when he hears of her debt, asks of her substance. Had her house been furnished with any valuable commodity, the prophet implies the necessity of selling it for satisfaction. Our own abundance can ill stand with our engagement to others. It is great injustice, for us to be full of others' purses. It is not our own, which we owe to another. What is it other than a plausible stealth, to feed our riot with the want of the owner?

He, that could multiply her substance, could know it. God, and his prophet, loves to hear our necessities out of our own mouths; 'Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.' It is neither news nor shame for a prophet to be poor.

Grief and want, perhaps, hastened his end: both of them are left for the dowry of his careful widow.

She had complained, if there had been any possibility of remedy, at home. Bashfulness had stopped her mouth thus long, and should have done yet longer, if the exigence of her children's servitude had not opened it. No want is so worthy of relief, as that which is loathest to come forth. 'Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of

all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few: and when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.'

She, that owed much and had nothing, yet must borrow more, that she may pay all. Poverty had not so discredited her with her neighbors, that they should doubt to lend her those vessels empty, which they had grudged full.

Her want was too well known: it could not but seem strange to the neighbors, to see this poor widow so busily pestering her house with empty tubs, which they knew she had nothing to fill. They knew well enough she had neither field, nor vineyard, nor orchard; and therefore must needs marvel at such unprofitable diligence.

If their curiosity would be inquiring after her intentions, she is commanded secresy. The doors must be shut on herself and her sons, while the oil is increasing: no eye shall see the miracle, in working; enough shall see it, once wrought. This act was no less a proof of her faith, than an improvement of her estate: it was an exercise of her devotion, as well as of her diligence. It was fit her doors should be shut, while her heart and lips were opened in a holy invocation.

Out of one small jar was poured out so much oil, as by miraculous multiplication filled all that empty cask. Scarce had that pot any bottom; at least, the bottom that it had was to be measured by the brims of all those vessels: this was so deep, as they were high: could they have held more, this pot had not been empty. Even so the bounty of our God gives grace and glory according to the capacity of the receiver: when he ceaseth to infuse, it is for want of room in the heart that takes it in: could we hold more, O God, thou wouldest give more: if there be any defect, it is in our vessels; not in thy beneficence.

How did the heart of this poor widow run over, as with wonder, so with joy and thankfulness, to see such a river of oil rise out of so small a spring! To see all her vessels swimming full, with so beneficial a liquor!

Justly is she affected with this sight: she is not transported from her duty. I do not see her run forth into the street, and proclaim her store; nor calling in her neighbors, whether to admire or bargain: I see her running to the prophet's door, and gratefully acknowledging the favor, and humbly depending on his directions; as not daring to dispose of that, which was so wondrously given her, without the advice of him by whose powerful means she had received it. Her own reason might have sufficiently suggested what to do: she dares not trust it; but consults with the oracle of God. If we would walk surely, we must do nothing without a word. Every action, every motion, must have a warrant. We can no more err with this guide, than not err without him.

The prophet sets her in a right way; 'Go sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children on the rest.' The first care is of her debts; the next, of her maintenance. It should be gross injustice, to raise means for herself and her charge, ere she have discharged the arrearages of her husband. None of the oil was hers, till her creditors were satisfied; all was hers that remained. It is but stealth, to enjoy a borrowed substance. While she had nothing, it was no sin to owe; but when once her vessels were full, she could not have been guiltless, if she had not paid before she stored. God and his prophets were bountiful: after the debts paid, they provide not only against the thraldom of her charge, but against the want. It is the just care of a religious heart, to defend the widow and children of a prophet from distress and penury.

Behold the true servant and successor of Elijah. What he did to the Sareptan widow, this did to the widow of a prophet. That increase of oil was by degrees, this at once: both, equally miraculous: this, so much more charitable, as it less concerned himself.

He, that gives kindnesses, doth by turns receive them. Elisha hath relieved a poor woman, is relieved by a rich. The Shunamite, a religious and wealthy matron, invites him to her house; and now, after the first entertainment, finding his occasions to call him to a frequent passage

that way, moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for the man of God.

It was his holiness, that made her desirous of such a guest. Well might she hope, that such an inmate would pay a blessing for his house-rent. O happy Shunamite, that might make herself the hostess of Elisha!

As no less dutiful than godly, she imparts her desire to her husband, whom her suit hath drawn to a partnership in this holy hospitality. Blessed of God is that man, whose bed yields him a help to heaven.

The good Shunamite desires not to harbor Elisha in one of her wonted lodgings; she solicits her husband to build him a chamber on the wall, apart. She knew the tumult of a large family unfit for the quiet meditations of a prophet: retiredness is most meet for the thoughts of a seer.

Neither would she bring him to bare walls; but sets ready for him a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick, and whatever necessary utensils, for his entertainment. The prophet doth not affect delicacy: she takes care to provide for his convenience. Those, that are truly pious and devout, think their houses and their hands cannot be too open to the messengers of God; and are most glad to exchange their earthly commodities for the others' spiritual. Superfluity should not fall within the care of a prophet, necessity must.

He, that could provide oil for the widow, could have provided all needful helps for himself. What room had there been for the charity and beneficence of others, if the prophet should have always maintained himself out of power?

The holy man is so far sociable, as not to neglect the friendly offer of so kind a benefactor. Gladly doth he take up his new lodging; and, as well pleased with so quiet a repose and careful attendance, he sends his servant Gehazi, with the message of his thanks, with a treaty of retribution; 'Behold, thou hast been careful for us, with all this care; What is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?' An ingenuous disposition cannot receive favors, without thoughts of return. A wise debtor

is desirous to retribute in some kind, as may be most acceptable to his obligers. Without this discretion, we may offer such requitals as may seem goodly to us; to our friends, worthless. Every one can choose best for himself. Elisha therefore, who had never been wanting in spiritual duties to so hospitable a friend, gives the Shunamite the election of her suit, for temporal recompense also. No man can be a loser by his favor to a prophet.

It is a good bearing, that an Elisha is in such grace at the court, that he can promise himself access to the king, in a friend's suit. It was not ever thus. The time was when his master heard, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' Now, the late miracle which Elisha wrought, in gratifying the three kings with water and victory, hath endeared him to the king of Israel; and now, 'Who but Elisha?' Even that rough mantle finds respect amongst those silks and tissues. As bad as Jehoram was, yet he honored the man of God. He, that could not prevail with an idolatrous king, in a spiritual reformation, yet can carry a civil suit.

Neither doth the prophet, in a sullen discontentment, fly off from the court, because he found his labors unprofitable; but still holds good terms with that prince whom he cannot reclaim; and will make use, notwithstanding, of his countenance, in matters, whether of courtesy or justice. We may not cast off our due respects, even to faulty authority; but must still submit and persist, where we are repelled.

Not to his own advancement doth Elisha desire to improve the king's favor, but to the behoof, to the relief of others. If the Shunamite have business at the court, she shall need no other solicitor. There cannot be a better office, nor more beseeming a prophet, than to speak in the cause of the dumb; to befriend the oppressed; to win greatness unto the protection of innocence.

The good matron needs no shelter of the great; 'I dwell among mine own people;' as if she said, 'The courtesy is not small in itself, but not useful to me. I live here quietly, in a contented obscurity; out of the

reach, either of the glories or cares of a court; free from wrongs; free from envies: not so high, as to provoke an evil eye; not so low, as to be trodden on. I have neither fears nor ambitions. My neighbors are my friends; my friends are my protectors; and, if I should be so unhappy as to be the subject of main injuries, would not stick to be mine advocates. This favor is for those, that either affect greatness, or groan under oppressions: I do neither; for, 'I live among mine own people.'' O Shunamite, thou shalt not escape envy! Who can hear of thy happy condition, and not say, 'Why am not I thus?'

If the world afford any perfect contentment, it is in a middle estate; equally distant from penury, from excess: it is in a calm freedom, a secure tranquillity, a sweet fruition of ourselves, of ours.

But what hold is there, of these earthly things? How long is the Shunamite thus blessed with peace? Stay but a while, you shall see her come on her knees to the king of Israel; pitifully complaining, that she was stripped of house and land: and now, Gehazi is fain to do that good office for her, which was not accepted from his master. Those, that stand fastest on earth, have but slippery footing. No man can say, that he shall not need friends.

Modesty sealed up the lips of the good Shunamite: she was ashamed to confess her longing: Gehazi easily guessed, that her barrenness could not but be her affliction. She was childless; her husband old: Elisha gratifies her with the news of a son; 'About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son!' How liberal is God, by his prophet, in giving beyond her requests! Not seldom, doth his bounty overreach our thoughts; and meet us with those benefits, which we thought too good for us to ask.

Greatness, and inexpectation, makes the blessing seem incredible. 'Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie to thine handmaid.' We are never sure enough of what we desire. We are not more hard to believe, than loath to distrust, beneficial events.

She well knew the prophet's holiness could not stand

with wilful falsehood. Perhaps, she might think it spoken by way of trial, not of serious affirmation: as unwilling therefore, that it should not be, and willing to hear that pleasing word seconded, she says, 'Do not lie to thine handmaid.'

Promises are made good, not by iteration, but by the effect. The Shunamite conceives; and bears a son, at the set season. How glad a mother she was, those know best, that have mourned under the discomfort of a sad sterility.

The child grows up; and is now able to find out his father in the field, amongst his reapers. His father now grew young again, with the pleasure of his sight; and more joyed, in this spring of his hopes, than in all the crops of his harvest.

But what stability is there, in these earthly delights? The hot beams of the sun beat on that head, which too much care had made tender and delicate. The child complains to his father of his pain! Oh, that grace could teach us what nature teaches infants, in all our troubles to bemoan ourselves to our heavenly Father! He sends him to his mother. On her lap, about noon, the child dies; as if he would return his soul into that bosom, from which it was derived to him.

The good Shunamite hath lost her son; her faith she hath not lost. Passion hath not robbed her of her wisdom. As not distracted, with an accident so sudden, so sorrowful, she lays her dead child on the prophet's bed: she locks the door: she hides her grief, lest that consternation might hinder her design: she hastens to her husband; and, as not daring to be other than officious in so distressful an occasion, acquaints him with her journey, though not with the cause; requires of him both attendance and conveyance.

She posts to mount Carmel. She cannot so soon find out the man of God, as he hath found her. He sees her afar off; and, like a thankful guest, sends his servant hastily to meet her, to inquire of the health of herself, her husband, her child. Her errand was not to Gehazi; it was to Elisha. No messenger shall interrupt her; no ear shall receive her complaint, but the prophet's. Down she

falls passionately at his feet; and, forgetting the fashion of her bashful strangeness, lays hold of him, whether in an humble veneration of his person, or in a fervent desire of satisfaction. Gehazi, who well knew how uncouth, how unfit this gesture of salutation was for his master, offers to remove her, and admonisheth her of her distance. The merciful prophet easily apprehends, that no ordinary occasion could so transport a grave and well-governed matron; as therefore pitying her unknown passion, he bids, 'Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.' If extremity of grief have made her unmannerly, wise and holy Elisha knows how to pardon it. He dares not add sorrow to the afflicted. He can better bear an unseemliness in her greeting, than cruelty in her molestation.

Great was the familiarity, that the prophet had with his God; and, as friends are wont mutually to impart their counsels to each other, so had the Lord done to him. Elisha was not idle on mount Carmel. What was it, that he saw not from thence? Not heaven only, but the world was before him; yet the Shunamite's loss is concealed from him: neither doth he shame to confess it. Ofttimes, those, that know greater matters, may yet be ignorant of the less. It is no disparagement to any finite creature, not to know something. By her mouth, will God tell the prophet, what, by vision, he had not; 'Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?'

Deep sorrow is sparing of words. The expostulation could not be more short, more quick, more pithy. 'Had I begged a son, perhaps my importunity might have been yielded to, in anger. Too much desire is justly punished with loss. It is no marvel, if what we wring from God prosper not. This favor to me was of thine own motion: thy suit, O Elisha, made me a mother. Couldst thou intend to torment me with a blessing? How much more easy had the want of a son been, than the miscarriage! barrenness, than orbation? Was there no other end of my having a son, than that I might lose him? O man of God, let me not complain of a cruel kindness. Thy prayers gave me a son; let thy prayers restore him. Let

not my dutiful respects to thee be repaid with an aggravation of misery. Give not thy handmaid cause to wish, that I were but so unhappy as thou foundest me. Oh woful fruitfulness, if I must now say, That I had a son!'

I know not, whether the mother or the prophet were more afflicted; the prophet for the mother's sake, or the mother for her own.

Not a word of reply do we hear, from the mouth of Elisha: his breath is only spent in the remedy. He sends his servant with all speed, to lay his staff on the face of the child; charging him to avoid all delays of the way.

Had not the prophet supposed that staff of his able to beat away death, why did he send it? And if on that supposition he sent it, how was it that it failed of effect? Was this act done out of human conceit, not out of instinct from God? Or did the want of the mother's faith hinder the success of that cure?

She, not regarding the staff or the man, holds fast to Elisha. No hopes of his message can loose her fingers; 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.' She imagined, that the servant, the staff, might be severed from Elisha: she knew that wherever the prophet was, there was power. It is good relying on those helps, that cannot fail us.

Merit and importunity have drawn Elisha, from Carmel to Shunem: he finds his lodging taken up, by that pale carcass: he shuts his door, and falls to his prayers: this staff of his, whatever became of the other, was long enough, he knew, to reach up to heaven; to knock at those gates; yea, to wrench them open. He applies his body, to those cold and senseless limbs. By the fervor of his soul, he reduces that soul; by the heat of his body, he educeth warmth out of that corpse. The child neeseth seven times; and, as if his spirit had been but hid for the time, not departed, it falls to work afresh: the eyes look up; the lips and hands move. The mother is called in, to receive a new life, in her twice-given son: she comes in, full of joy, full of wonder, and bows herself to the ground, and falls down before those feet, which she had so boldly laid hold of in Carmel.

O strong faith of the Shunamite, that could not be dis-

couraged with the seizure and continuance of death; raising up her heart still, to an expectation of that life, which to the eyes of nature had been impossible, irrevocable! O infinite goodness of the Almighty, that would not suffer such faith to be frustrate; that would rather reverse the laws of nature, in returning a guest from heaven, and raising a corpse from death, than the confidence of a believing heart should be disappointed!

How true an heir is Elisha of his master; not in his graces only, but in his actions! Both of them divided the waters of Jordan; the one as his last act, the other as his first: Elijah's curse was the death of the captains and their troops; Elisha's curse was the death of the children: Elijah rebuked Ahab to his face; Elisha, Jehoram: Elijah supplied the drought of Israel, by rain from heaven; Elisha supplied the drought of the three kings, by waters gushing out of the earth: Elijah increased the oil of the Sareptan; Elisha increased the oil of the prophet's widow: Elijah raised from death the Sareptan's son; Elisha, the Shunamite's: both of them had one mantle, one spirit; both of them climbed up one Carmel, one heaven.—2 Kings iv.

ELISHA WITH NAAMAN.

Of the full showers of grace, which fell on Israel and Judah, yet some drops did light on their neighbors. If Israel be the worse for her nearness to Syria, Syria is the better for the vicinity of Israel. Amongst the worst of God's enemies, some are singled out for mercy.

Naaman was a great warrior, an honorable courtier, yet a leper. No disease incident to the body is so nasty, so loathsome, as leprosy. Greatness can secure no man, from the most odious and wearisome condition. How little pleasure did this Syrian peer take, to be stooped to by others, while he hated to see himself. Even those, that honored him, avoided him; neither was he other than abhorred of those, that flattered him; yea, his hand could not move to his mouth, without his own detestation: the basest slave of Syria would not change skins with him, if he might have his honor to boot. Thus hath the wise God thought meet, to sauce the valor, dignity, renown, victo-

ries, of the famous general of the Syrians. Seldom ever was any man served with simple favors. These compositions make both our crosses tolerable, and our blessings wholesome.

The body of Naaman was not more tainted with his leprosy, than his soul was tainted with Rimmon; and, besides his idolatry, he was a professed enemy to Israel, and successful in his enmity. How far doth God fetch about his purposes! The leprosy, the hostility, of Naaman shall be the occasions of his salvation: that leprosy shall make his soul sound; that hostility shall adopt him a son of God.

In some prosperous inroads, that the Syrians, under Naaman's conduct, have made into the land of Israel, a little maid is taken captive: she shall attend on Naaman's wife; and shall suggest to her mistress the miraculous cures of Elisha. A small chink may serve to let in much light. Her report finds credit in the court; and begets both a letter from the king and a journey of his peer. While the Syrians thought of nothing but their booty, they bring happiness to the house of Naaman. The captivity of a poor Hebrew girl is a means, to make the greatest lord of Syria a subject to God.

It is good to acquaint our children with the works of God, with the praises of his prophets. Little do we know how they may improve this knowledge, and whither they may carry it: perhaps the remotest nations may light their candle at their coal.

Even the weakest intimations may not be neglected: a child, a servant, a stranger, may say that which we may bless God to have heard.

How well did it become the mouth of an Israelite to extol a prophet; to wish the cure of her master, though an Aramite; to advise that journey unto the man of God, by whom both body and soul might be cured! True religion teacheth us pious and charitable respects to our governors, though aliens from the commonwealth of God.

No man, that I hear, blames the credulity of Naaman. On no other ground, doth the king of Syria send his chief peer, with his letters to the king of Israel; from his hands requiring the cure. The Syrian supposed, that whatever

a subject could do, a sovereign might command; that such a prophet could neither be out of the knowledge, nor out of the obedience to his prince. Never did he dream of any exemption; but imagining Jehoram to be no less a king of prophets than of people, and Elisha no less a subject than a seer, he writes, 'Now when this letter is come to thee, behold, I have herewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayst recover him of his leprosy.'

Great is the power of princes: every man's hand is theirs; whether for skill, or for strength. Besides the eminency of their own gifts, all the subordinate excellencies of their subjects are no less at their service, than if they were inherent in their persons. Great men are wanting to their own perfections, if they do not both know and exercise the graces of their inferiors.

The king of Israel cannot read the letter, without amazement of heart, without rending of garments; and says, 'Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me, to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, and see, I pray you, how he seeketh a quarrel against me.' If God have vouchsafed to call kings gods, it well becomes kings to call themselves men, and to confess the distance wherein they stand to their Maker. Man may kill; man cannot kill and make alive; yea, of himself he can do neither. With God, a worm or a fly may kill a man; without God, no potentate can do it: much less, can any created power both kill and revive; since, to restore life is more than to bereave it, more than to continue it, more than to give it: and if leprosy be a death, what human power can either inflict or cure it?

It is a trouble to a well-affected heart, to receive impossible commands. To require that of an inferior, which is proper to the Highest, is a derogation from that supreme power, whose property it is. Had Jehoram been truly religious, the injury done to his Maker in this motion, as he took it, had more afflicted him, than the danger of his own quarrel. Belike, Elisha was not in the thoughts of the king of Israel. He might have heard, that this prophet had made alive one, whom he killed not: him-

self, with the two other kings, had been eye-witnesses, of what Elisha could do; yet now, the calves of Dan and Bethel have so often taken up his heart, that there is no room for the memory of Elisha: whom he sued to in his extremity, now his prosperity hath forgotten. Carnal hearts, when need drives them, can think of God and his prophet; when their turn is served, can as utterly neglect them, as if they were not.

Yet, cannot good Elisha repay neglect and forgetfulness. He listens what is done at the court; and, finding the distress of his sovereign, proffers that service, which should have been required; 'Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.'

It was no small fright, from which Elisha delivers his king. Jehoram was in awe of the Syrians, ever since their late victory; wherein his father Ahab was slain, Israel and Judah discomfited. Nothing was more dreadful to him, than the frowns of these Aramites. The quarrel, which he suspected to be hatched by them, is cleared by Elisha: their leper shall be healed: both they and Israel shall know, they have neglected a God, whose prophet can do wonders. Many eyes, doubtless, are fastened on the issue of this message.

But what state is this, that Elisha takes on him? He doth not say, 'I will come to him;' but, 'Let him come now to me.' The three kings came down once to his tent: it is no marvel, if he prevent not the journey of a Syrian courtier. It well beseems him, that will be a suitor for favor, to be obsequious. We may not stand on terms of our labor or dignity, where we expect a benefit.

Naaman comes, richly attended with his troops of servants and horses, and waits in his chariot at the door of a prophet. I do not hear Elisha call him in; for though he were great, yet he was leprous: neither do I see Elisha come forth to him, and receive him with such outward courtesies, as might be fit for an honorable stranger; for in those rich clothes the prophet saw an Aramite, and perhaps some tincture of the late-shed blood of Israel: rather, that he might make a perfect trial of the humility of that man, whom he means to gratify and honor, after

some short attendance at his door, he sends his servant with a message to that peer, who could not but think the meanest of his retinue, a better man than Gehazi's master.

What could the prophet have done other, to the lackey of Naaman's man? He, that would be a meet subject of mercy, must be thoroughly abased in his own conceit; and must be willingly pliable, to all the conditions of his humiliation.

Yet, had the message carried in it either respect to the person or probability of effect, it could not have been unwelcome; but now it sounded of nothing, but sullenness and unlikelihood; 'Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.'

What wise man could take this, for any other than a mere scorn and mockery; 'Go, wash?' Alas! what can water do? It can cleanse from filthiness; not from leprosy. And why in Jordan? What differs that from other streams? And why just seven times? What virtue is either in that channel or in that number?

Naaman can no more put off nature, than leprosy. In what a chafe did he fling away, from the prophet's door; and says, 'Am I come thus far, to fetch a flout from an Israelite? Is this the issue, both of my journey and the letters of my king? Could this prophet find no man to play on, but Naaman? Had he meant seriously, why did he think himself too good, to come forth unto me? Why did he not touch me with his hand, and bless me with his prayers, and cure me with his blessing? Is my misery fit for his derision? If water could do it, what needed I to come so far for this remedy? Have I not oft done thus, in vain? Have we not better streams at home, than any Israel can afford? 'Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel.''

Folly and pride strive for place, in a natural heart; and it is hard to say, whether is more predominant: folly, in measuring the power of God's ordinances, by the rule of human discourse and ordinary event; pride, in a scornful valuation of the institutions of God, in comparison of our own devices.

'Abana and Pharphar,' two for one: 'rivers,' not waters; 'of Damascus,' a stately city, and incomparable: 'Are they not?' Who dares deny it? 'Better,' not as good; 'than the waters,' not the rivers; all the waters, Jordan and all the rest; 'of Israel,' a beggarly region to Damascus.'

No where shall we find a truer pattern of the disposition of nature: how she is altogether led by sense and reason; how she fondly judges of all objects by the appearance; how she acquaints herself only with the common road of God's proceedings; how she sticks to her own principles; how she misconstrues the intentions of God; how she overconceits her own; how she disdains the mean conditions of others; how she upbraids her opposites, with the proud comparison of her own privileges. Nature is never but like herself. No marvel, if carnal minds despise the foolishness of preaching, the simplicity of sacraments, the homeliness of ceremonies, the seeming inefficacy of censures. These men look on Jordan, with Syrian eyes; one drop of whose water, set apart by divine ordination, hath more virtue, than all the streams of Abana and Pharphar.

It is a good matter, for a man to be attended with wise and faithful followers. Many a one hath had better counsel from his heels, than from his elbows. Naaman's servants were his best friends. They came to him, and spake to him, and said, 'My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean.'

These men were servants, not of the humor, but of the profit, of their master. Some servile spirits would have cared only to soothe up, not to benefit their governor; and would have encouraged his rage, by their own: 'Sir, will you take this at the hand of a base fellow? Was ever man thus flouted? Will you let him carry it away thus? Is any harmless anger sufficient revenge, for such an insolence? Give us leave at least to pull him out by the ears, and force him to do that by violence, which he would not do out of good manners. Let our fingers teach this saucy prophet, what it is to offer an affront to a prince of Syria.' But these men loved more their master's health,

than his passion; and would rather therefore to advise, than flatter; to draw him to good, than follow him to evil. Since it was a prophet, from whom he received this prescription, they persuade him not to despise it; intimating there could be no fault in the slightness of the receipt, so long as there was no defect of power in the commander; that the virtue of the cure should be in his obedience, not in the nature of the remedy.

They persuade, and prevail. Next to the prophet, Naaman may thank his servants, that he is not a leper. He goes down, on their entreaty, and dips seven times in Jordan. His flesh riseth; his leprosy vanisheth: not the unjust fury and techiness of the patient shall cross the cure; lest, while God is severe, the prophet should be discredited.

Long enough might Naaman have washed there in vain, if Elisha had not sent him. Many a leper hath bathed in that stream, and hath come forth no less impure. It is the word, the ordinance, of the Almighty, which puts efficacy into those means, which, of themselves, are both impotent and improbable. What can our font do to the washing away of sin? If God's institution shall put virtue into our Jordan, it shall scour off the spiritual leprosies of our hearts; and shall more cure the soul, than cleanse the face.

How joyful is Naaman, to see this change of his skin, in this renovation of his flesh, of his life! Never did his heart find such warmth of inward gladness, as in this stream.

On the sight of his recovery, he doth not post home to the court, or to his family, to call for witnesses, for partners of his joy; but thankfully returns to the prophet, by whose means he received this mercy. He comes back with more contentment, than he parted with rage.

Now will the man of God be seen of that recovered Syrian, whom he would not see leprous. His presence shall be yielded to the gratulation, which was not yielded to the suit. Purposely did Elisha forbear before, that he might share no part of the praise of this work with his Maker; that God might be so much more magnified, as the means were more weak and despicable.

The miracle hath his due work. First, doth Naaman

acknowledge the God that wrought it; then, the prophet, by whom he wrought it: 'Behold, now I know there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.' O happy Syrian, that was at once cured of his leprosy, and his misprision of God! Naaman was too wise to think, that either the water had cured him, or the man: he saw a divine power working in both; such as he vainly sought, from his heathen deities: with the heart therefore, he believes; with the mouth, he confesses.

While he is thus thankful to the Author of his cure, he is not unmindful of the instrument; 'Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.' Naaman came richly furnished with ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, ten changes of raiment: all these and many more would the Syrian peer have gladly given, to be delivered from so noisome a disease; no marvel, if he importunately offer some part of them to the prophet, now that he is delivered: some testimony of thankfulness did well, where all earthly recompense was too short. The hands of this man were no less full of thanks, than his mouth. Dry and barren professions of our obligations, where is power to requite, are unfit for noble and ingenuous spirits.

Naaman is not more frank in offering his gratuity, than Elisha vehement in refusing it; 'As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.' Not that he thought the Syrian gold impure; not that he thought it unlawful to take up a gift, where he hath laid down a benefit; but the prophet will remit of Naaman's purse, that he may win of his soul. The man of God would have his new convert see cause, to be more enamoured of true piety, which teacheth her clients, to contemn those worldly riches and glories, which base worldlings adore; and would have him think, that these miraculous powers are so far transcending the valuation of all earthly pelf, that those glittering treasures are worthy of nothing but contempt, in respect thereof: hence is it, that he, who refused not the Shunamite's table and stool and candlestick, will not take Naaman's present. There is much use of godly discretion, in directing us, when to open, when to shut our hands.

He, that will not be allowed to give, desires yet to

take; 'Shall there not, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules-load of earth? For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but unto the Lord.' Israelitish mould lay open to his carriage, without leave of Elisha; but Naaman regards not to take it, unless it may be given him, and given him by the prophet's hand. Well did this Syrian find, that the man of God had given a supernatural virtue to the water of Israel, and therefore supposed he might give the like to his earth. Neither would any earth serve him but Elisha's; else, the mould of Israel had been more properly craved of the king than the prophet of Israel.

Doubtless, it was devotion that moved this suit. The Syrian saw God had a propriety in Israel; and imagines that he will be best pleased with his own. On the sudden was Naaman half a proselyte.

Still here was a weak knowledge, with strong intentions. He will sacrifice to the Lord; but where? in Syria, not in Jerusalem. Not the mould, but the altar, is that which God respects; which he hath allowed no where, but in his chosen Sion.

This honest Syrian will be removing God home to his country; he should have resolved to remove his home to God: and though he vows to offer no sacrifice to any other God, yet he craves leave to offer an outward courtesy to Rimmon; though not for the idol's sake, yet for his master's: 'In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon, to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.'

Naaman goes away resolute to profess himself an Israelite for religion. All the Syrian court shall know, that he sacrifices on Israelitish earth, to the God of Israel. They shall hear him protest, to have neither heart nor knee for Rimmon. If he must go into the house of that idol, it shall be as a servant, not as a suppliant: his duty to his master shall carry him; not his devotion to his master's god: if his master go to worship there; not he:

neither doth he say, 'When I bow myself to the image of Rimmon;' but, 'in the house.' He shall bow, to be leaned on, not to adore.

Yet, had not Naaman thought this a fault, he had not craved a pardon. His heart told him, that a perfect convert should not have abided the roof, the sight, the air, of Rimmon; that his observance of an earthly master should not draw him to the semblance of an act of outward observance, to the rival of his Master in heaven; that a sincere detestation of idolatry could not stand with so unseasonable a courtesy.

Far, therefore, is Naaman from being a pattern, save of weakness; since he is yet more than half a Syrian; since he willingly accuses himself, and, instead of defending, deprecates his offence. It is not for us to expect a full stature in the cradle of conversion. As nature, so grace rises by many degrees to perfection. Leprosy was in Naaman cured, at once; not, corruption.

The prophet, as glad to see him but thus forward, dismisses him with a civil valediction. Had an Israelite made this suit, he had been answered with a check; thus much from a Syrian was worthy a kind farewell.

They are parted. Gehazi cannot thus take his leave. His heart is nailed up in the rich chests of Naaman, and now he goes to fetch it. The prophet and his man had not looked with the same eyes on the Syrian treasure; the one with the eye of contempt, the other with the eye of admiration and covetous desire. The disposition of the master may not be measured, by the mind, by the act of his servant. Holy Elisha may be attended by a false Gehazi. No examples, no counsels, will prevail with some hearts.

Who would not have thought, that the follower of Elisha could be no other than a saint? yet, after the view of all those miracles, this man is a mirror of worldliness. He thinks his master either too simple or too kind to refuse so just a present from a Syrian; himself will be more wise, more frugal. Desire hastens his pace: he doth not go, but run, after his booty.

Naaman sees him; and, as true nobleness is ever courteous, alights from his chariot to meet him. The

great lord of Syria comes forth of his coach, to salute a prophet's servant; not fearing that he can humble himself overmuch to one of Elisha's family. He greets Gehazi with the same word wherewith he lately was dimitted by his master; 'Is it peace?' So sudden a messenger might seem to argue some change.

He soon receives from the breathless bearer, news of his master's health, and request; 'All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the prophets: give me, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.' Had Gehazi craved a reward in his own name, calling for the fee of the prophet's servant, as the gain so the offence had been the less: now, reaching at a greater sum, he belies his master, robs Naaman, burdens his own soul.

What a sound tale hath the craft of Gehazi devised; of the number, the place, the quality, the age, of his master's guests; that he might set a fair color on that pretended request: so proportioning the value of his demand, as might both enrich himself, and yet well stand with the moderation of his master! Love of money can never keep good quarter with honesty, with innocence. Covetousness never lodged in the heart alone: if it find not, it will breed wickedness. What a mint of fraud there is in a worldly breast! How readily can it coin subtle falsehood for an advantage!

How thankfully liberal was this noble Syrian! Gehazi could not be more eager in taking than he was in giving. As glad of so happy an occasion of leaving any piece of his treasure behind him, he forces two talents on the servant of Elisha; and binds them in two bags, and lays them on two of his own servants. His own train shall yield porters to Gehazi. Cheerfulness is the just praise of our beneficence. Bountiful minds are as zealous in overpaying good turns, as the niggardly are in scanting retributions.

What projects do we think Gehazi had all the way? How did he please himself, with the waking dreams of purchases, of traffic, of jollity! And now, when they are come to the tower, he gladly disburdens and dismisses

his two Syrian attendants, and hides their load, and wipes his mouth, and stands boldly before that master whom he had so foully abused.

O Gehazi! where didst thou think God was this while? Couldst thou thus long pour water on the hands of Elisha, and be either ignorant or regardless of that undeceivable eye of Providence, which was ever fixed on thy hands, thy tongue, thy heart? Couldst thou thus hope to blind the eyes of a seer? Hear then thy indictment, thy sentence, from him whom thou thoughtest to have mocked with thy concealment; 'Whence comest thou, Gehazi?' 'Thy servant went no whither.'

He, that had begun a lie to Naaman, ends it to his master. Whoso lets his tongue once loose to a wilful untruth, soon grows impudent in multiplying falsehoods.

Of what metal is the forehead of that man that dares lie to a prophet? What is this, but to outface the senses? 'Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?' Didst thou not till now know, O Gehazi, that prophets have spiritual eyes, which are not confined to bodily prospects? Didst thou not know, that their hearts were often, where they were not? Didst thou not know, that thy secretest ways were overlooked by invisible witnesses? Hear then, and be convinced: hither thou wentest; thus thou saidst; thus thou didst; thus thou spedst.

What answer was now here but confusion? Miserable Gehazi! how didst thou stand pale and trembling before the dreadful tribunal of thy severe master; looking for the woful sentence of some grievous judgment for so heinous an offence? "'Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and,' which thou hadst already purchased in thy conceit, 'olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?' Did my mouth refuse, that thy hands might take? Was I so careful, to win honor to my God and credit to my profession, by denying these Syrian presents, that thou mightest dash both in receiving them? Was there no way to enrich thyself, but by belying thy master; by disparaging this holy function in the eyes of a new convert? Since thou wouldst needs therefore take part of Naaman's

treasure, take part with him in his leprosy; 'The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever.'"

Oh heavy talents of Gehazi! Oh the horror of this one unchangeable suit, which shall never be but loathsomely white, noisomely unclean! How much better had been a light purse and homely coat, with a sound body, a clear soul! Too late doth that wretched man now find, that he hath loaded himself with a curse; that he hath clad himself with shame. His sin shall be read ever in his face, in his seed: all passengers, all posterities, shall now say, 'Behold the characters of Gehazi's covetousness, fraud, sacrilege!'

The act overtakes the word; 'He went out of his presence a leper as white as snow.' It is a woful exchange that Gehazi hath made with Naaman. Naaman came a leper, returned a disciple; Gehazi came a disciple, returned a leper: Naaman left behind both his disease and money; Gehazi takes up both his money and his disease. Now shall Gehazi never look on himself, but he shall think of Naaman, whose skin is transferred on him with those talents; and shall wear out the rest of his days in shame, and pain, and sorrow. His tears may wash off the guilt of his sin; but shall not, like another Jordan, wash off his leprosy: that shall ever remain, as an hereditary monument of divine severity. This son of the prophets shall more loud and lively preach the justice of God by his face, than others by their tongue. Happy was it for him, if, while his skin was snow-white with leprosy, his humble soul were washed white as snow with the water of true repentance.—2 Kings v.

ELISHA RAISING THE IRON; BLINDING THE ASSYRIANS.

There was no loss of Gehazi: when he was gone, the prophets increased. An ill man in the church is but like some shrubby tree in a garden, whose shade keeps better plants from growing. A blank doth better in a room, than an ill filling. The view of God's just judgments doth rather draw clients unto him, than alienate them.

The kings of Israel had succeeded in idolatry and hate

of sincere religion; yet the prophets multiply. Persecution enlargeth the bounds of the church. These very tempestuous showers bring up flowers and herbs in abundance. There would have been neither so many nor so zealous prophets in the languishment of peace.

Besides, what marvel is it, if the immediate succession of two such noble leaders as Elijah and Elisha, established and augmented religion, and bred multitudes of prophets? Rather, who cannot marvel, on the knowledge of all their miracles, that all Israel did not prophesy? It is a good hearing, that the prophets want elbow-room; out of their store, not out of the envy of neighbors, or incompetency of provision. 'Where vision fails, the people perish;' they are blessed where it abounds.

When they found themselves straitened, they did not presume to crave for themselves; but they craved the leave, the counsel, of Elisha; 'Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.' It well becomes the sons of the prophets, to enterprise nothing without the allowance of their superiors.

Here was a building towards, none of the curiousest. I do not see them making means for the procurement of some cunning artificers, nor for the conquisition of some costly marbles and cedars; but every man shall hew, and square, and frame, his own beam. No nice terms were stood on by these sons of the prophets. Their thoughts were fixed on the perfection of a spiritual building. As a homely roof may serve them, so their own hands shall raise it. The fingers of these contemplative men did not scorn the axe, and mallet, and chisel. It was better being there than in Obadiah's cave; and they, that dwell now contentedly under rude sticks, will not refuse the squared stones and polished contignations of better times. They shall be ill teachers of others, that have not learned both to want and to abound.

The master of this sacred society, Elisha, is not stately nor austere. He gives not only passage to this motion of his collegiates, but assistance. It was fit the sons of the prophets should have convenience of dwelling, though not pomp, not costliness.

They fall to their work. No man goes slackly about the building of his own house.

One of them, more regarding the tree than the tool, lets fall the head of the axe into the river. Poor men are sensible of small losses. He makes his moan to Elisha; 'Alas, master! for it was borrowed.' Had the axe been his own, the trouble had been the less to forego it: therefore doth the miscarriage afflict him, because it was of a borrowed axe. Honest minds are more careful of what they have by loan, than by propriety. In lending there is a trust, which a good heart cannot disappoint without vexation.

Alas, poor novices of the prophet; they would be building, and were not worth their axes! if they would give their labor, they must borrow their instruments. Their wealth was spiritual. Outward poverty may well stand with inward riches. He is rich, not that hath the world, but that can contemn it.

Elisha loves and cherishes this just simplicity. Rather will he work a miracle, than a borrowed axe shall not be restored.

It might easily be imagined, he, that could raise up the iron out of the bottom of the water, could tell where it fell in; yet even that powerful hand calls for direction. In this one point, the son of the prophet knows more than Elisha. The notice of particularities is neither fit for a creature, nor communicable. A mean man may best know his own case; this novice better knows where his axe fell than his master: his master knows better how to get it out than he.

There is no reason to be given of supernatural actions. The prophet borrows an axe to cut a helve for the lost axe. Why did he not make use of that handle which had cast the head? Did he hold it unworthy of respect, for that it had abandoned the metal wherewith it was trusted? Or, did he make choice of a new stick, that the miracle might be more clear and unquestionable?

Divine power goes a contrary way to art. We first would have procured the head of the axe, and then would have fitted it with a helve; Elisha fits the head to the helve, and causeth the wood, which was light and

knew not how to sink, to fetch up the iron, which was heavy, and naturally incapable of supernatation.

Whether the metal were stripped of the natural weight, by the same power which gave it being; or whether, retaining the wonted poise, it was raised up by some spiritual operation; I inquire not: only, I see it swim like cork on the stream of Jordan; and move towards the hand that lost it. What creature is not willing to put off the properties of nature, at the command of the God of nature? O God, how easy is it for thee, when this hard and heavy heart of mine is sunk down into the mud of the world, to fetch it up again by thy mighty word; and cause it to float on the streams of life, and to see the face of heaven again!

Yet still do the sides of Israel complain of the thorns of Aram. The children of Ahab rue their father's unjust mercy. From an enemy, it is no making question, whether of strength or wile. The king of Syria consults with his servants, where to encamp for his greatest advantage. Their opinion is not more required than their secresy.

Elisha is a thousand scouts. He sends word to the king of Israel, of the projects, of the removes, of his enemy. More than once had Jehoram saved both his life and his host, by these close admonitions. It is well, that in something yet a prophet may be obeyed.

What strange state-service was this, which Elisha did, besides the spiritual! The king, the people of Israel owe themselves and their safety to a despised prophet! The man of God knew and felt them idolaters: yet, how careful and vigilant is he for their rescue! If they were bad, yet they were his own: if they were bad, yet not all; God had his number amongst their worst: if they were bad, yet the Syrians were worse. The Israelites misworshipped the true God; the Syrians worshipped a false. That, if it were possible, he might win them, he will preserve them; and, if they will needs be wanting to God, yet Elisha will not be wanting to them: their impiety shall not make him undutiful.

There cannot be a juster cause of displeasure, than the disclosing of those secret councils, which are laid up in our ear, in our breast. The king of Syria, not without

reason, stomachs this supposed treachery. What prince can bear, that an adverse power should have a party, a pensionary, in his own court?

How famous was Elisha, even in foreign regions! Besides Naaman, others of the Syrian nobility take notice of the miraculous faculties of this prophet of Israel. He is accused for this secret intelligence. No words can escape him, though spoken in the bed-chamber. O Syrian, whosoever thou wert, thou saidst not enough. If thy master do but whisper in thine ear, if he smother his words within his own lips, if he do but speak within his own bosom, Elisha knows it from an infallible information. What council is it, O God, that can be hid from thee? What council is it, that thou wilt hide from thy seer? Even this very word, that acenseth the prophet, is known to the accused. He hears this tale while it is in telling. He hears the plot for his apprehension.

How ill do the projects of wicked men hang together! They, that confess Elisha knows their secretest words, do yet confer to take him! There are spies on him, whose espials have moved their anger and admiration.

He is descried to be in Dothan, a small town of Manasseh. A whole army is sent thither to surprise him. The opportunity of the night is chosen for the exploit. There shall be no want, either in the number, or valor, or secresy, of these conspired troops: and now, when they have fully girt in the village with a strong and exquisite siege, they make themselves sure of Elisha; and please themselves to think, how they have encaged the miserable prophet, how they should take him at unawares in his bed in the midst of a secure dream, how they should carry him fettered to their king, what thanks they should have for so welcome a prisoner.

The successor of Gehazi riseth early in the morning, and sees all the city encompassed with a fearful host of foot, horse, chariots. His eyes could meet with nothing, but woods of pikes, and walls of harness, and lustre of metals; and now he runs in, affrighted, to his master: 'Alas, my master! what shall we do?' He had day enough, to see they were enemies that environed them,

to see himself helpless and desperate; and hath only so much life left in him, as to lament himself to the partner of his misery. He cannot flee from his new master, if he would; he runs to him with a woful clamor, 'Alas, my master! what shall we do?'

Oh the undaunted courage of faith! Elisha sees all this; and sits in his chamber so secure, as if these had only been the guard of Israel for his safe protection.

It is a hard precept that he gives his servant; 'Fear not.' As well might he have bid him not to see when he saw, as not to fear when he saw so dreadful a spectacle. The operations of the senses are no less certain than those of the affections, where the objects are no less proper. But the task is easy, if the next word may find belief; 'For there are more with us than with them.' Multitude, and other outward probabilities, do both lead the confidence of natural hearts, and fix it. It is for none but a David to say, 'I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about.' Flesh and blood riseth and falleth, according to the proportion of the strength or weakness of apparent means.

Elisha's man looked about him; yet his master prays, 'Lord, open his eyes that they may see.' Naturally we see not while we do see. Every thing is so seen as it is: bodily eyes discern bodily objects; only spiritual can see the things of God. Some men want both eyes and light: Elisha's servant had eyes, wanted illumination. No sooner were his eyes open, than he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. They were there before; neither doth Elisha pray, that those troops may be gathered, but that they may be seen; not till now were they descried. Invisible armies guard the servants of God, while they seem most forsaken of earthly aid, most exposed to certain dangers. If the eyes of our faith be as open as those of our sense, to see angels as well as Syrians, we cannot be appalled with the most unequal terms of hostility. Those blessed spirits are ready, either to rescue our bodies, or to carry up our souls to blessedness; whither

ever shall be enjoined by their Maker: there is just comfort in both; in either.

Both those chariots that came to fetch Elijah, and those that came to defend Elisha, were fiery. God is not less lovely to his own, in the midst of his judgments, than he is terrible to his enemies, in the demonstration of his mercies.

Thus guarded, it is no marvel, if Elisha dare walk forth into the midst of the Syrians. Not one of those heavenly presidiaries struck a stroke for the prophet; neither doth he require their blows, only he turns his prayer to his God, and says, 'Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.' With no other than deadly intentions did these Aramites come down to Elisha; yet doth not he say, 'Smite them with the sword,' but 'Smite them with blindness.' All the evil he wisheth to them is, their repentance. There was no way to see their error but by blindness. He, that prayed for the opening of his servant's eyes to see his safeguard, prays for the blinding of his enemies, that they might not see to do hurt.

As the eyes of Elisha's servant were so shut, that they saw not the angels when they saw the Syrians; so the eyes of the Syrians shall be likewise shut, that when they see the man, they shall not see the prophet. To all other objects, their eyes are clear; only to Elisha, they shall be blind; blind, not through darkness, but through misknowledge. They shall see and mistake both the person and place. He, that made the senses, can either hold or delude them at pleasure. How easily can he offer to the sight other representations than those which arise from the visible matter, and make the heart to believe them!

Justly now might Elisha say, 'This is not the way, neither is this the city,' wherein Elisha shall be descried. He was in Dothan; but not as Elisha. He shall not be found, but in Samaria; neither can they have any guide to him but himself.

No sooner are they come into the streets of Samaria, than their eyes have leave to know both the place and the prophet. The first sight they have of themselves is

in the trap of Israel, in the jaws of death. Those stately palaces, which they now wonder at unwillingly, carry no resemblance to them, but of their graves. Every Israelite seems an executioner; every house a jail; every beam a gibbet. And now, they look on Elisha, transformed from their guide to their common murderer, with horror and paleness. It is most just with God, to entangle the plotters of wickedness in their own snare.

How glad is a mortal enemy to snatch at all advantages of revenge! Never did the king of Israel see a more pleasing sight, than so many Syrian throats at his mercy; and, as loath to lose so fair a day, as if his fingers itched to be dipped in blood, he says, 'My father, shall I smite, shall I smite them?' The repetition argued desire: the compellation, reverence. Not without allowance of a prophet would the king of Israel lay his hand on an enemy, so miraculously trained home. His heart was still foul with idolatry; yet would he not taint his hand with forbidden blood. Hypocrisy will be still scrupulous in something; and, in some awful restraints, is a perfect counterfeit of conscience.

The charitable prophet soon gives an angry prohibition of slaughter; 'Thou shalt not smite them: wouldst thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?' As if he said, 'These are God's captives, not thine; and if they were thine own, their blood could not be shed without cruelty. Though in the hot chases of war, executions may be justifiable; yet in the coolness of deliberation, it can be no other than inhuman, to take those lives which have been yielded to mercy. But here, thy bow and thy sword are guiltless of the success: only a strange providence of the Almighty hath cast them into thy hands, whom neither thy force nor thy fraud could have compassed. If it be victory thou aimest at, overcome them with kindness; 'Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink.''

Oh noble revenge of Elisha, to feast his persecutors! To provide a table for those, who had provided a grave for him! These Syrians came to Dothan, full of bloody purposes to Elisha: he sends them from Samaria, full of

good cheer and jollity. Thus, thus, should a prophet punish his pursuers. No vengeance but this is heroical, and fit for Christian imitation; 'If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat; if he thirst, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head; and the Lord shall reward thee: be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.'

The king of Israel hath done that by his feast, which he could not have done by his sword. The bands of Syria will no more come by way of ambush or incursion, into the bounds of Israel. Never did a charitable act go away, without the retribution of a blessing. In doing some good to our enemies, we do most good to ourselves. God cannot but love in us this imitation of his mercy, who bids his sun shine and his rain fall, where he is most provoked; and that love is never fruitless.—2 Kings vi.

THE FAMINE OF SAMARIA RELIEVED.

Not many good turns are written in marble. Soon have these Syrians forgotten the merciful beneficence of Israel. After the forbearance of some hostile inroad, all the forces of Syria are mustered against Jehoram. That very Samaria, which had relieved the distressed Aramites, is by the Aramites besieged; and is famished by those, whom it had fed.

The famine within the walls was more terrible than the sword without. Their worst enemy was shut within; and could not be dislodged of their own bowels.

Whither hath the idolatry of Israel brought them? Before, they had been scourged with war, with drought, with dearth, as with single cord; they remain incorrigible: and now, God twists two of these bloody lashes together, and galls them even to death.

There need no other executioners, than their own maws. Those things, which in their nature were not edible, at least to an Israelite, were now both dear and dainty. The ass was, besides the untoothsomeness, an impure creature. That, which the law of ceremonies had made unclean, the law of necessity had made delicate and precious. The bones of so carrion a head could not be picked, for less than four hundred pieces of silver.

Neither was this scarcity of victuals only, but of all other necessaries for human use. That the belly might not complain alone, the whole man was equally pinched.

The king of Israel is neither exempted from the judgment, nor yet yields under it. He walks on the walls of his Samaria, to oversee the watches set, the engines ready, the guards changed, together with the posture of the enemy; when a woman cries to him out of the city, 'Help, my lord, O king!'

Next to God, what refuge have we in all our necessities, but his anointed? Earthly sovereignty can aid us, in the case of the injustice of men; but what can it do, against the judgments of God? 'If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press?' Even the greatest powers must stoop to afflictions, in themselves; how should they be able to prevent them, in others! To sue for aid, where is an utter impotence of redress, is but to upbraid the weakness, and aggravate the misery, of those whom we implore.

Jehoram mistakes the suit. The suppliant calls to him, for a woful piece of justice. Two mothers have agreed to eat their sons: the one hath yielded hers, to be boiled and eaten; the other, after she hath taken her part of so prodigious a banquet, withdraws her child, and hides him from the knife. Hunger and envy make the plaintiff importunate; and now she craves the benefit of royal justice. She, that made the first motion, withholds her part of the bargain; and flies from that promise, whose trust had made this mother childless. Oh the direful effects of famine, that turns off all respects of nature, and gives no place to horror; causing the tender mother to lay her hands, yea, her teeth on the fruit of her own body; and to receive that into her stomach, which she hath brought forth of her womb!

What should Jehoram do? The match was monstrous. The challenge was just; yet unnatural. This complainant had purchased one half of the living child, by the one half of hers, dead. The mother of the surviving infant is pressed by covenant, by hunger; restrained by nature. To force a mother to deliver up her child to voluntary slaughter, had been cruel; to force a debtor to pay a con-

fessed arrearage, seemed but equal. If the remaining child be not dressed for food, this mother of the devoured child is both robbed and famished; if he be, innocent blood is shed by authority. It is no marvel, if the question astonished the judge; not so much for the difficulty of the demand, as the horror of the occasion.

To what lamentable distress, did Jehoram find his people driven! Not without cause did the king of Israel rend his garments, and show his sackcloth. Well might he see his people branded with that ancient curse, which God had denounced against the rebellious; 'The Lord shall bring a nation against thee of a fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young; and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters. The tender and delicate woman, her eyes shall be evil towards her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward the children which she shall bear; for she shall eat them, for want of all things, secretly in the siege and straitness.'

He mourns for the plague: he mourns not for the cause of this plague; his sin, and theirs. I find his sorrow; I find not his repentance. The worst man may grieve for his smart; only the good heart grieves for his offence.

Instead of being penitent, Jehoram is furious, and turns his rage from his sins, against the prophet; 'God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day.' Alas! what hath the righteous done? Perhaps Elisha, that we may imagine some colors of this displeasure, fotethreatened this judgment; but they deserved it: perhaps he might have averted it, by his prayers; their unrepentance disabled him: perhaps he persuaded Jehoram to hold out the siege; though through much hardness: he foresaw the deliverance. In all this, how hath Elisha forfeited his head? All Israel did not afford a head so guiltless, as this that was destined to slaughter. This is the fashion of the world: the lewd blame the innocent; and will revenge their own sins, on others' uprightness.

In the midst of all this sad estate of Samaria, and these

storms of Jehoram, the prophet sits quietly in his own house, amongst his holy consorts; bewailing, no doubt, both the sins and misery of their people; and prophetically conferring of the issue; when, suddenly, God reveals to him the bloody intent and message of Jehoram, and he at once reveals it to his fellows; 'See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head?' Oh the inimitable liberty of a prophet! The same God, that showed him his danger, suggested his words: he may be bold, where we must be awful.

Still is Naboth's blood laid in Jehoram's dish. The foul fact of Ahab blemisheth his posterity; and now, when the son threats violence to the innocent, murder is objected to him as hereditary.

He, that foresaw his own peril, provides for his safety; 'Shut the door, and hold him fast at the door.' No man is bound, to tender his throat to an unjust stroke.

This bloody commission was prevented, by a prophetical foresight. The same eye, that saw the executioner coming to smite him, saw also the king hasting after him, to stay the blow. The prophet had been no other than guilty of his own blood, if he had not reserved himself awhile, for the rescue of authority.

Oh the inconstancy of carnal hearts! It was not long, since Jehoram could say to Elisha, 'My father, shall I smite them?' now, he is ready to smite him as an enemy, whom he honored as a father: yet again, his lips had no sooner given sentence of death against the prophet, than his feet stir to recall it.

It should seem that Elisha, on the challenges and expostulations of Jehoram's messenger, had sent a persuasive message to the king of Israel, yet awhile to wait patiently on God for his deliverance. The discontented prince flies off in an impotent anger; 'Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?'

Oh the desperate resolutions of impatient minds! They have stinted God, both for his time and his measure: if he exceed either, they either turn their backs on him, or fly in his face. The position was true; the inference deadly. All that evil was of the Lord: they de-

served it; he sent it: what then? It should have been therefore argued, 'He, that sent it, can remove it: I will wait on his mercy, under whose justice I suffer: impatience and distrust shall but aggravate my judgment: "It is the Lord, let him do what he will." But now, to despair because God is just, to defy mercy because it lingers, to reject God for correction, it is a presumptuous madness, an impious pettishness.

Yet, in spite of all these provocations, both of king and people, Elisha hath good news for Jehoram; 'Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.' Miserable Israel now sees an end of this hard trial. One day's patience shall free them, both of siege and famine. God's deliverances may overstay our expectation; not the due period of his own councils. Oh infinite mercy, when man says, 'No longer,' God says, 'To-morrow!' As if he would condescend, where he might judge; and would please them, who deserved nothing but punishment.

The word seemed not more comfortable, than incredible. 'A lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?' Prophecies, before they be fulfilled, are riddles: no spirit can read them, but that by which they are delivered.

It is a foolish and injurious infidelity, to question a possibility, where we know the message is God's. How easy is it, for that omnipotent hand to effect those things, which surpass all the reach of human conceit! Had God intended a miraculous multiplication, was it not as easy for him, to increase the corn or meal of Samaria, as the widow's oil? Was it not as easy for him to give plenty of victuals without opening the windows of heaven, as to give plenty of water without wind or rain?

The Almighty hates to be distrusted. This peer of Israel shall rue his unbelief; 'Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof:' the sight shall be yielded, for conviction; the fruition shall be denied, for punishment. Well is that man worthy to want the benefit, which he would not believe. Who can pity, to see infi-

delity excluded from the blessings of earth, from the glory of heaven?

How strange a choice, doth God make, of the intelligencers of so happy a change! Four lepers sit at the entering of the gate. They see nothing but death before them: famine, within the walls; the enemy, without. The election is woful: at last, they resolve on the lesser evil. 'Famine is worse than the Syrian. In the famine, there is certainty of perishing; amongst the Syrians, hazard. Perhaps the enemy may have some pity; hunger hath none: and, were the death equally certain, it were more easy to die by the sword, than by famine.'

On this deliberation, they come down into the Syrian camp, to find either speed of mercy or dispatch. Their hunger would not give them respite till morning. By twilight, are they fallen on the uttermost tents. 'Behold, there was no man.' They marvel at the silence and solitude. They look, and listen. The noise of their own feet affrighted them. Their guilty hearts supplied the Syrians; and expected fearfully those, which were as fearfully fled.

How easily can the Almighty confound the power of the strong, the policy of the wise! God puts a panic terror into the hearts of the proud Syrians. He makes them hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host. They say one to other, 'Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us:' they arise therefore in a confused rout; and, leaving all their substance behind them, flee for their lives. Not long before, Elisha's servant saw chariots and horses, but heard none: now, these Syrians hear chariots and horses, but see none: that sight comforted his heart; this sound dismayed theirs. The Israelites heard no noise, within the walls; the lepers heard no noise, without the gates; only the Syrians heard this noise, in their camp. What a scorn doth God put on these presumptuous Aramites! He will not vouchsafe to use any substantial stratagem against them. Nothing but an empty sound shall scatter them; and send them home empty of substance, laden with shame, half dead with fear. The very

horses, that might have hastened their flight, are left tied in their tents. Their very garments are a burden. All is left behind, save their very bodies; and those, breathless for speed.

Doubtless, these Syrians knew well, to what miserable exigencies the enclosed Israelites were brought by their siege; and now made full account to sack and ransack their Samaria: already had they divided and swallowed the prey, when suddenly God puts them into a ridiculous confusion, and sends them to seek safety in their heels: no booty is now in price with them, but their life; and happy is he, that can run fastest. Thus, the Almighty laughs at the designs of insolent men; and shuts up their counsels in shame.

The fear of the four lepers begins now to give way to security. They fill their bellies, and hide their treasures, and pass from one tent to another, in a fastidious choice of the best commodities: they, who ere while would have held it happiness enough to have been blessed with a crust, now wantonly rove for dainties, and from necessity leap into excess.

How far self-love carries us in all our actions, even to the neglect of the public! Not till their own bellies and hands and eyes were filled, did these lepers think of imparting this news to Israel: at last, when themselves are glutted, they begin to remember the hunger of their brethren; and now they find room for remorse; 'We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.' Nature teaches us, that it is an injury, to engross blessings; and so to mind the private, as if we had no relation to a community. We are worthy to be shut out of the city gates for lepers, if the respects to the public good do not oversway us in all our desires, in all our demeanor; and well may we, with these covetous lepers, fear a mischief upon ourselves, if we shall wilfully conceal blessings from others.

The conscience of this wrong and danger sends back the lepers into the city. They call to the porters, and soon transmit the news to the king's household. The king of Israel complains not, to have his sleep broken, with such intelligence: he ariseth in the night; and, not

contemning good news, though brought by lepers, consults with his servants of the business.

We cannot be too jealous, of the intentions of an enemy. Jehoram wisely suspects this flight of the Syrians, to be but simulatory and politic; only to draw Israel out of their city, for the spoil of both. There may be more peril, in the back of an enemy, than in his face: the cruellest slaughters have been in retiring; easily therefore is the king persuaded to adventure some few forlorn scouts, for further assurance. The word of Elisha is out of his head, out of his heart; else there had been no place for this doubt. Timorous hearts never think themselves sure. Those, that have no faith, had need of much sense.

Those few horses that remain are sent forth for discovery. They find nothing but monuments of frightfulness, pledges of security.

Now Israel dares issue forth to the prey. There, as if the Syrians had come thither to enrich them, they find granaries, wardrobes, treasures, and whatever may serve either for use or ostentation. Every Israelite goes away filled, laden, wearied with the wealthy spoil.

As scarcity breeds dearth, so plenty cheapness. To-day, a measure of fine flour is lower rated; than yesterday, of dung.

The distrustful peer of Israel sees this abundance, according to the word of the prophet, but enjoys it not. He sees this plenty can come in at the gate, though the windows of heaven be not open. The gate is his charge: the affamished Israelites press in upon him, and bear him down in the throng. Extreme hunger hath no respect to greatness. Not their rudeness, but his own unbelief, hath trampled him under feet. He, that abased the power of God by his distrust, is abased worthily to the heels of the multitude. Faith exalts a man above his sphere; infidelity depresses him into the dust, into hell. He, that believes not, is condemned already.—2 Kings vii.

BOOK XX.

THE SHUNAMITE SUING TO JEHORAM; ELISHA CONFERRING WITH HAZAEL.

How royally hath Elisha paid the Shunamite for his lodging! To him already she owes the life of her son, both given and restored; and now again, after so many years as might well have worn out the memory of so small a courtesy, herself, her son, her family, owe their lives, to so thankful a guest. That table, and bed, and stool, and candlestick, was well bestowed: that candlestick repaid her the light of her future life and condition; that table, the means of maintenance; that stool, a seat of safe abode; that bed, a quiet rest for the common calamities of her nation. He is a niggard to himself, that scants his beneficence to a prophet; whose very cold water shall not go unrewarded.

Elijah preserved the Sareptan from famine; Elisha, the Shunamite: he, by provision of oil and meal; this, by premonition; 'Arise, and go, thou and thine household, and sojourn whersoever thou canst sojourn.' The Sareptan was poor, and driven to extremes; therefore the prophet provides for her, from hand to mouth: the Shunamite was wealthy, and therefore the prophet sends her to provide for herself. The same goodness, that relieves our necessity, leaves our competency to the hand of our own counsel: in the one, he will make use of his own power; in the other, of our providence.

The very prophet advises this holy client, to leave the bounds of the church; and to seek life, where she should not find religion. Extremity is, for the time, a just dispensation with some common rules of our outward demeanor and motions, even from better to worse. All Israel and Judah shall be affamished: the body can be preserved no where, but where the soul shall want. Sometimes the conveniences of the soul must yield to bodily necessities. Wantonness and curiosity can find no advantage from that, which is done out of the power of need.

It is a long famine, that shall afflict Israel. He, on whom the spirit of Elijah was doubled, doubled the judgment inflicted by his master. Three years and a half, did Israel gasp under the drought of Elijah; seven years' dearth shall it suffer, under Elisha. The trials of God are, many times, not more grievous for their sharpness, than for their continuance.

This scarcity shall not come alone. God shall call for it: whatever be the second cause, he is the first. The executioners of the Almighty (such are his judgments) stand ready waiting upon his just throne; and do no sooner receive the watchword, than they fly on the world, and plague it for sin. Only the cry of our sins moves God, to call for vengeance; and if God once call, it must come. How oft, how earnestly, are we called to repentance, and stir not! The messengers of God's wrath fly forth, at the least beck; and fulfil the will of his revenge on those, whose obedience would not fulfil the will of his command.

After so many proofs of fidelity, the Shunamite cannot distrust the prophet; not staying therefore to be convicted by the event, she removes her family into the land of the Philistines. No nation was more opposite to Israel, none more worthily odious; yet there, doth the Shunamite seek and find shelter. Even the shade of those trees that are unwholesome, may keep us from a storm. Every where will God find room for his own.

The fields of Philistines florish, while the soil of Israel yields nothing but weeds and barrenness: not that Israel was more sinful, but that the sin of Israel was more intolerable. The offers of grace are so many aggravations of wickedness. In equal offences, those do justly smart more, who are more obliged. No pestilence is so contagious, as that which hath taken the purest air.

These Philistine neighbors would never have endured themselves to be pestered with foreigners, especially Israelites; whom they hated, besides religion, for their usurpation. Neither were they, in all likelihood, pressed with multitude. The rest of Israel were led on with hopes; presuming on the amends of the next harvest,

till their want grew desperate and irremediable. Only the forewarned Shunamite prevents the mischief. Now she finds what it is, to have a prophet her friend. Happy are those souls, that, on all occasions, consult God's seers: they shall be freed from the plagues, wherein the secure blindness of others is heedlessly overtaken.

Seven years, had this Shunamite sojourned in Palestine: now she returns to her own; and is excluded. She, that found harbor among Philistines, finds oppression and violence among Israelites: those of her kindred, taking advantage of her absence, had shared her possessions. How oft doth it fall out, that the worst enemies of a man are those of his own house!

All went by contraries, with this Shunamite. In the famine, she had enough; in the common plenty, she was scanted: Philistines were kind unto her; Israelites, cruel. Both our fears and our hopes do not seldom disappoint us. It is safe trusting to that stay, which can never fail us; who can easily provide us, both of friendship in Palestine, and of justice in Israel.

We may not judge of the religion by particular actions. A very Philistine may be merciful, when an Israelite is unjust. The person may be faulty, when the profession is holy.

It was not long, since the prophet made that friendly offer to the Shunamite, out of the desire of a thankful requital; 'What is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?' and she answered; 'I dwell among my brethren.' Little did she then think of this injurious measure; else she might have said, 'I dwell among mine enemies; I dwell among robbers.' It is like they were then friendly, who were now cruel and oppressive. There is no trust to be reposed in flesh and blood. How should their favors be constant, who are, in their nature and disposition, variable? It is the surest way, to rely on Him, who is ever like himself; the measure of whose love is eternity.

Whither should the Shunamite go, to complain of her wrong, but to the court? There is no other refuge of the oppressed, but public authority. All justice is derived from sovereignty. Kings are not called gods, for

nothing: they do both sentence and execute for the Almighty.

Doubtless, now the poor Shunamite thought of the courteous proffer of Elisha; and, missing a friend at the court, is glad to be the presenter of her own petition.

How happily doth God contrive all events, for the good of his! This suppliant shall fall upon that instant for her suit, when the king shall be talking with Gehazi; when Gehazi shall be talking of her to the king. The words of Gehazi, the thoughts of the king, the desires of the Shunamite, shall be all drawn together, by the wise providence of God, into the centre of one moment, that his oppressed servant might receive a speedy justice. Oh the infinite wisdom, power, mercy, of our God, that insensibly orders all our ways; as to his own holy purposes, so to our best advantage!

What doth Jehoram the king, talking with Gehazi the leper? That very presence was an eyesore. But if the cohabitation with the infectious were forbidden, yet not the conference.

Certainly, I begin to think of some goodness in both these. Had there not been some goodness in Jehoram, he had not taken pleasure to hear, even from a leprous mouth, the miraculous acts and praises of God's prophet: had there not been some goodness in Gehazi, he had not, after so fearful an infliction of judgment, thus ingenuously recounted the praises of his severe master.

He, that told that dear-bought lie to the prophet, tells now all truths of the prophet to the king. Perhaps, his leprosy had made him clean: if so; happy was it for him, that his forehead was white with the disease, if his soul became hereon white with repentance.

But we may well know, that the desire or report of historical truths doth not always argue grace. Still Jehoram, after the inquiry of the prophet's miracles, continues his idolatry. He, that was curious to hearken after the wonders of Elisha, is not careful to follow his doctrine. Therefore are Gehazi and the Shunamite met before him, that he may be convicted, who will not be reformed. Why was it else, that the presence of the persons should thus unexpectedly make good the relation,

if God had not meant the inexcusableness of Jehoram, while he must needs say within himself; 'Thus potent is the prophet of that God, whom I obey not. Were not Elisha's the true God, how could he work such wonders? And if he be the true God, why is he not mine? But what? Shall I change Ahab's God, for Jehoshaphat's? No: I cannot deny the miracles; I will not admit of the author. Let Elisha be powerful, I will be constant.'

O wretched Jehoram! How much better had it been for thee, never to have seen the face of Gehazi and the son of the Shunamite, than to go away unmoved, with the vengeance of leprosy in the one, with the merciful resuscitation of the other! Therefore is thy judgment fearfully aggravated, because thou wouldst not yield to what thou couldst not oppose. Had not Ahab's obdurateness been propagated to his son, so powerful demonstrations of divine power could not have been ineffectual. Wicked hearts are so much worse, by how much God is better. This anvil is the harder, by being continually beaten on; whether with judgments or mercy.

Yet, this good use will God have made of this report and this presence, that the poor Shunamite shall have justice. That son, whose life was restored, shall have his inheritance revived: his estate shall fare the better for Elisha's miracles. How much more will our merciful God second his own blessings, when the favors of unjust men are therefore drawn to us, because we have been the subjects of divine beneficence!

It was a large and full award, that this occurrence drew from the king; 'Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land, even until now.' Not the present possession only is given her, but the arrearages.

Nothing binders, but that outward justice may stand with gross idolatry.

The widow may thank Elisha for this. His miracle wrought still; and puts this new life in her dead estate. His absence did that, for the preservation of life, which his presence did, for the restoring it from death. She, that was so ready to expostulate with the man of God on the loss of her son, might perhaps have been as ready, to

impute the loss of her estate to his advice: now, that for his sake she is enriched with her own, how doth she bless God for so happy a guest! When we have forgotten our own good turns, God remembers and crowns them. Let us do good to all, while we have time; but especially to the household of faith.

Could Israel have been sensible of their own condition, it was no small unhappiness, to lose the presence of Elisha. Whether for the idolatries, or for the famine of Israel, the prophet is gone into Syria. No doubt Naaman welcomed him thither; and now would force on him thanks for his cure, which the man of God would not receive at home.

How famous is he now grown, that was taken from the team! His name is not confined to his own nation: foreign countries take notice of it; and kings are glad to listen after him, and woo him with presents. Benhadad, the king of Syria, whose councils he had detected, rejoiceth to hear of his presence; and now, as having forgotten that he had sent a whole host to besiege the prophet in Dothan, sends an honorable messenger to him, laden with the burden of forty camels, to consult with this oracle, concerning his sickness and recovery.

This Syrian, belike, in distress dares not trust to his own gods; but, having had good proof of the power of the God of Israel, both in Naaman's cure and in the miraculous defeats of his greatest forces, is glad to send to that servant of God, whom he had persecuted. Wicked men are not the same, in health and in sickness: their affliction is worthy of the thanks, if they be well minded; not themselves.

Doubtless, the errand of Benhadad was not only to inquire of the issue of his disease, but to require the prayers of the prophet for a good issue. Even the worst man doth so love himself, that he can be content to make a beneficial use of those instruments, whose goodness he hateth.

Hazael, the chief peer of Syria, is designed to this message. The wealth of his present strives with the humility of his carriage and speech: 'Thy son, Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I rece-

ver of this disease?' Not long since, Jehoram, king of Israel, had said to Elisha, 'My father, shall I smite them?' and now, Benhadad, king of Syria, says, 'My father, shall I recover?'

Lo, how this poor Meholathite hath kings to his sons! How great is the honor of God's prophets with pagans, with princes! Who can be but confounded, to see evangelical prophets despised by the meanest Christians?

It is more than a single answer, that the prophet returns to this message. One answer he gives to Benhadad, that sent it; another he gives to Hazael, that brings it: that to Benhadad, is, 'Thou mayest surely recover:' That to Hazael, 'The Lord hath showed me, that he shall surely die.' What shall we say then? Is there a lie, or an equivocation, in the holy mouth of the prophet? God forbid. It is one thing, what shall be the nature and issue of the disease; another thing, what may outwardly befal the person of Benhadad. The question is moved of the former; whereto the answer is direct; the disease is not mortal: but withal an intimation is given to the bearer, of an event beyond the reach of his demand; which he may know, but either needs not, or may not return; 'The Lord hath showed me, that he shall surely die;' by another means, though not by the disease.

The seer of God descries more in Hazael, than he could see in himself: he fixes his eyes therefore stedfastly in the Syrian's face, as one that in those lines read the bloody story of his life.

Hazael blushes; Elisha weeps. The intention of those eyes did not so much amaze Hazael, as the tears. As yet, he was not guilty to himself, of any wrong that might strain out this juice of sorrow; 'Why weepeth my lord?'

The prophet fears not to foretel Hazael, all the villanies which he should once do to Israel; how he should fire their forts, and kill their young men, and rip the mothers, and dash their children.

I marvel not now, at the tears of those eyes, which foresaw this miserable vastation of the inheritance of God; the very mention whereof is abhorred of the future author: "What, is thy servant a dog, that I should do this great

thing?' They are savage cruelties, whereof thou speakest. It were more fit for me to weep, that thou shouldest repute me so brutish. I should no less condemn myself for a beast, if I could suspect my own degeneration so far.'

Wicked men are carried into those heights of impiety, which they could not, in their good mood, have possibly believed. Nature is subject to favorable opinions of itself; and will rather mistrust a prophet of God, than her own good disposition. How many, from honest beginnings, have risen to incredible licentiousness; whose lives are now such, that it were as hard for a man to believe they had ever been good, as to have persuaded them once they should prove so desperately ill!

To give some overture unto Hazael, of the opportunity of this ensuing mischief, the prophet foretells him from God, that he shall be the king of Syria.

He, that shows the event, doth not appoint the means. Far was it from the Spirit of God's prophet, to set or encourage a treason; while he said therefore, 'Thou shalt be king of Syria,' he said not, 'Go home, and kill thy master;' the wicked ambition of Hazael draws this damnable conclusion, out of holy premises; and now, having fed the hopes of his sovereign with the expectation of recovery, the next day he smothers his master. The impotent desire of rule brooks no delay. Had not Hazael been gracelessly cruel, after he had received this prediction of the seer, he should have patiently awaited for the crown of Syria, till lawful means had set it on his head. Now, he will, by a close execution, make way to the throne. A wet cloth hath stopped the mouth of his sick sovereign. No noise is heard: the carcase is fair. Who can complain of any thing, but the disease?

O Hazael! thou shalt not thus easily stop the mouth of thine own conscience; that shall call thee traitor, even in thy chair of state; and shall check all thy royal triumphs, with, 'Thou hast founded thy throne in blood.' I am deceived, if this wet cloth shall not wipe thy lips, in thy jolliest feasts; and make thy best morsels unsavory. Sovereignty is painful, on the fairest terms; but on treachery and murder, tormenting. Woful is the

case of that man, whose public cares are aggravated with private guiltiness; and happy is he, that can enjoy a little, with the peace of an honest heart.—2 Kings viii.

JEHU WITH JEHORAM AND JEZEBEL.

YET Hazael began his cruelty with loss. Ramoth Gilead is won from him. Jehoram the son hath recovered that, which Ahab his father attempted in vain.

That city was dear bought of Israel: it cost the life of Ahab, the blood of Jehoram. Those wounds were healed with victory. The king tends his health at Jezreel; while the captains were enjoying, and seconding their success at Ramoth.

Old Elisha hath neither cottage nor foot of land; yet, sitting in an obscure corner, he gives order for kingdoms: not by way of authority, (this usurpation had been no less proud, than unjust,) but by way of message, from the God of Kings. Even a mean herald may go on a great errand. The prophets of the Gospel have nothing to do, but with spiritual kingdoms; to beat down the kingdoms of sin and Satan; to translate souls to the kingdom of heaven.

He, that renewed the life of the Shunamite's son, must stoop to age. That block lies in his way to Jehu. The aged prophet employs a speedier messenger, who must also gird up his loins, for haste. No common pace will serve us, when we go on God's message: the very loss of minutes may be unrecoverable.

This great seer of God well saw a present concurrence of all opportunities: the captains of the host were then readily combined for this exploit; the army was on foot; Jehoram absent; a small delay might have troubled the work: the dispersion of the captains and host, or the presence of the king, might either have defeated or slacked the dispatch. He is prodigal of his success, that is slow in his execution.

The directions of Elisha to the young prophet are full and punctual; whither to go; what to carry; what to do; where to do it; what to say; what speed to make, in his act, in his return. In the businesses of God, it matters not how little is left to our discretion. There is no important

business of the Almighty, wherein his precepts are not strict and express; look, how much more specialty there is in the charge of God, so much more danger is in the violation.

The young prophet is curiously obedient; in his haste; in his observation and carriage: and finding Jehu, according to Elisha's prediction, set amongst the captains of the host, he singles him forth, by a reverent compellation; 'I have an errand to thee, O captain.' Might not the prophet have stayed, till the table had risen, and then have followed Jehu to his lodging? Surely, the wisdom of God hath purposely pitched on this season, that the public view of a sacred messenger, and the hasty evocation of so noted a person to such a secresy, might prepare the hearts of those commanders of Israel, to the expectation of some great design.

The inmost room is but close enough for this act. Ere many hours, all Israel shall know that, which yet may not be trusted with one eye. The goodness of God makes wise provision for the safety of his messengers; and, while he employs their service, prevents their dangers.

But how is it, that, of all the kings of the ten tribes, none was ever anointed, but Jehu? Is it, for that the God, who would not countenance the erection of that usurped throne, would countenance the alteration? Or is it, that by this visible testimony of divine ordination the courage of the Israelitish captains might be raised up, to second the high and bold attempt of him, whom they saw destined from heaven to rule?

Together with the oil of this unction, here was a charge of revenge; a revenge of the blood of the prophets, on Jezebel; of wickedness and idolatry, on Ahab: neither was the extirpation of this lewd family foreprophesied only to Jehu, but enjoined.

Elijah foretold, and the world expected, some fearful account, of the abominable cruelty and impiety of that accursed house. Now it is called for, when it seemed forgotten. Ahab shall have no posterity; Jezebel shall have no tomb, but the dogs. This woful doom is committed to Jehu's execution.

Oh the sure, though patient justice of the Almighty!

Not only Ahab and Jezebel had been bloody and idolatrous, but Israel was drawn into the partnership of their crimes. All these shall share in the judgment. Elijah's complaint in the cave now receives this late answer: Hazael shall plague Israel: Jehu shall plague the house of Ahab and Jezebel. Elisha's servant thus seconds Elisha's master. When wickedness is ripe in the field, God will not let it shed to grow again; and cuts it up, by a just and seasonable vengeance. Ahab's drooping under the threat hath put off the judgment from his own days; now it comes, and sweeps away his wife, his issue; and falls heavy on his subjects. Please yourselves, O ye vain sinners, in the slow pace of vengeance. It will be neither less certain, nor more easy, for the delay: rather it were to pay for that leisure, in the extremity.

The prophet hath done his errand, and is gone. Jehu returns to his fellows, with his head not more wet with oil, than busied with thoughts. No doubt, his face bewrayed some inward tumults and distractions of imagination: neither seemed he to return the same he went out. They ask therefore, 'Is all well? Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?'

The prophets of God were to these idolatrous Israelites, like comets; who were never seen, without the portendment of a mischief. When the priests of their Baal were quietly sacrificing, all was well; but now, when a prophet of God comes in sight, their guiltiness asks, 'Is all well?' All would be well, but for their sins. They fear not these; they fear their reprover.

Israel was come to a good pass, when the prophets of God went with them for madmen. O ye Baalitish ruffians, whither hath your impiety and profaneness carried you, that ye should thus blaspheme the servants of the living God? Ye, that run on madding after vain idols, tax the sober guides of true worship, for madness! Thus it becomes the godless enemies of truth, the heralds of our patience, to miscall our innocence, to revile our most holy profession. What wonder is it, that God's messengers are madmen unto those, to whom the wisdom of God is foolishness?

The message was not delivered to Jehu, for a conceal-

ment, but for publication. Silenes could not effect the word that was told him; common notice must; "Ye know the man, and his communication.' The habit shows you the man; the calling shows you his errand.' Even prophets were distinguished by their clothes. Their mantle was not the common wear. Why should not this sacred vocation be known by a peculiar attire? These captains had not called him a madman, if they had not known him a prophet. By the man therefore, they might guess at his message. Prophets do not use to appear, but on serious errands; whether of reproof, or of prediction.

Nice civilities of denials were not then known to the world. They said, 'It is false; tell us now.' Amongst these captains, no combat, no unkindness follows, on a word so rudely familiar.

Jehu needs not tell them, that the man was a prophet: he tells them the prophecy of the man; what he had said, what he had done.

Their eyes had no sooner seen the oil, their ears had no sooner heard, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel,' than they rise from their seats, as rapt with a tempest, and are hurled into arms. So do they haste to proclaim Jehu, that they scarce stay to snatch up their garments; which they had perhaps left behind them for speed, had they not meant with these rich habiliments, to garnish a state for their new sovereign. To whom, having now erected an extemporal throne, they do, by the sound of trumpets, give the style of royalty, 'Jehu is king.'

So much credit hath that mad fellow with these gallants of Israel, that on his word they will presently adventure their lives, and change the crown. God gives a secret authority to his despised servants; so as they, which hate their person, yet reverence their truth: even very scorners cannot but believe them. If, when the prophets of the Gospel tell us of a spiritual kingdom, they be distrusted of those which profess to observe them, how shameful is the disproportion! how just shall their judgment be!

Yet I cannot say, whether mere obedience to the

prophet, or personal dislikes of Jehoram, or partial respects to Jehu, drew the captains of Israel. The will of God may be done thanklessly; when, fulfilling the substance, we fail of the intention, and err in circumstance.

Only Ramoth is conscious of this sudden inauguration. This new princedom yet reaches no further, than the sound of the trumpet. Jehu is no less subtle, than valiant. He knew, that the notice of this unexpected change might work a busy and dangerous resistance: he therefore gives order, that no messenger of the news may prevent his personal execution; that so he might surprise Jehoram in his palace of Jezreel, whether tending his late wounds, or securely feasting his friends, and dreaming of nothing less than danger; and might be seen and felt at once. Secresy is the safest guard of any design. Disclosed projects are either frustrated, or made needlessly difficult.

Neither is Jehu more close, than swift. That very trumpet with the same wind sounds his march. From the top of the stairs, he steps down into his chariot. That man means to speed, who can be at once reserved in his counsels, and resolute and quick in his performances.

Who could but pity the unhappy and unseasonable visitation of the grandchild of Jehoshaphat, were it not that he was degenerate into the family of Ahab? Ahaziah, king of Judah, is come to visit Jehoram, king of Israel. The knowledge of his late-received wounds hath drawn thither this kind ill-matched ally. He, who was partner of the war, cannot but be a visitor of the wounds.

The two kings are in the height of their compliment and entertainments, when the watchman of the tower of Jezreel espies a troop, afar off. For aught was known, there was nothing but peace in all the land of Israel; and Judah was now so combined with it, that both their kings were feasting under one roof: yet in the midst of this supposed safety, the watch-tower is not unfurnished with heedy eyes. No security of peace can free wise governors from a careful suspicion of what may come,

and a providence against the worst. Even while we know of no enemies, the watch-tower of due intelligence may not be empty.

In vain are dangers foreseen, if they be not premonished. It is all one, to have a blind and a mute watchman. This speaks what he sees: 'I see a company.'

Doubtless, Jehoram's head was now full of thoughts: neither knew he what construction to put on this approaching troop. 'Perhaps the Syrians,' he thinks, 'may have recovered Ramoth; and chased the garrison of Israel.' Neither can he imagine, whether these should be hostile victors, or vanquished subjects, or conspiring rebels. Every way, this rout was dreadful. O Jehoram, thou beginnest thy fears too late. Hadst thou been afraid to provoke the God of Israel, thy innocency had yielded no room to these terrors.

A horseman is dispatched, to discover the meaning of this descried concourse. He meets them, and inquires of peace; but receives a short answer; 'What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me.' A second is addressed; with the same success. Both attend the train of Jehu, instead of returning. Indeed, it is not for private persons to hope to rectify the public affairs, when they are grown to a height of disorder, and from thence to a ripeness of miscarriage. Sooner may a well-meaning man hurt himself, than redress the common danger.

These messengers were now within the mercy of a multitude. Had they but endeavored to retire, they had perished as wilfully, as vainly. Whosoever will be striving against the torrent of a just judgment, must needs be carried down in the stream. Sometimes, there is as much wisdom in yielding, as courage in resistance.

Had this troop been far off, the watchman could not have descried the arrival of the messengers, their turning behind, the manner of the march. Jehu was a noted captain. His carriage, and motion, was observed more full of fire, than his fellows: 'The driving is like Jehu's, for he driveth furiously.' God makes choice of fit instru-

ments, as of mercy, so of revenge. These spirits were needful for so tragical a scene, as was now preparing in Israel.

Jehoram and Ahaziah, as nettled with this forced patience of expectation, can no longer keep their seats; but will needs hasten their chariots; and fetch that costly satisfaction, which would not be sent, but given.

They are infatuated, which shall perish: otherwise Jehoram had been warned enough, by the forcible retention of his messengers, to expect none but an enemy: a friend or a subject could not have been unwilling to be known, to be looked for: now, forgetting his wounds, he will go to fetch death.

Yet, when he sees Jehu, whom he left a subject, hopes strive with his doubts; "Is it peace, Jehu?' What may be the reason of this sudden journey? Is the army foiled by the Syrians? Is Ramoth recovered? Or hath the flight of the enemy left thee no further work? Or is some other ill news guilty of thy haste? What means this unwished presence and return?'

There needs no stay for an answer. The very face of Jehu, and those sparkling eyes of his, spake fury, and death to Jehoram; which yet his tongue angrily seconds: "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?' Wicked tyrant, what speakest thou of peace with men, when thou hast thus long waged war with the Almighty? That cursed mother of thine hath nursed thee with blood, and trained thee up in abominable idolatries. Thou art not more hers, than her sin is thine. Thou art polluted with her spiritual whoredoms, and enchanted with her hellish witchcrafts. Now, that just God, whom thou and thy parents have so heinously despited, sends thee by me this last message of his vengeance;' which while he spake, his hand is drawing up that deadly arrow, which shall cure the former wounds with a worse.

Too late now, doth wretched Jehoram turn his chariot, and flee, and cry, 'Treason, O Ahaziah.' There was treason before, O Jehoram: thy treason against the Majesty of God is now revenged, by the treason of Jehu against thee. That fatal shaft, notwithstanding the swift pace of

both the chariots, is directed to the heart of Jehoram. There is no erring of those feathers, which are guided by the hand of destiny.

How just are the judgments of God! It was in the field of Naboth, wherein Jehoram met with Jehu: that very ground called to him for blood. And now this new avenger remembers that prophecy, which he heard from the mouth of Elijah, in that very place, following the heels of Ahab; and is careful to perform it. Little did Jehu think, when he heard that message of Elijah, that his hands should act it: now, as zealous of accomplishing the word of a prophet, he gives charge to Bidkar his captain, that the bleeding carcass of Jehoram should be cast on that very plat of Naboth. Oh Naboth's blood well paid for! Ahab's blood is licked by dogs, in the very place, where those dogs licked Naboth's; Jehoram's blood shall manure that ground, which was wrung from Naboth; and Jezebel shall add to this compost! Oh garden of herbs dearly bought, royally dunged!

What a resemblance there is, betwixt the death of the father and the son; Ahab and Jehoram! Both are slain in their chariot; both with an arrow; both repay their blood to Naboth; and how perfect is this retaliation! Not only Naboth miscarried in that cruel injustice, but his sons also; else the inheritance of the vineyard had descended to his heirs, notwithstanding his pretended offence: and now not only Ahab forfeits his blood to this field, but his son Jehoram also. Face doth not more answer to face, than punishment to sin.

It was time for Ahaziah, king of Judah, to flee: nay, it had been time long before, to have fled from the sins, yea from the house of Ahab. That brand is fearful, which God sets on him; 'He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab,' for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. Affinity is too often guilty of corruption. The son of good Jehoshaphat is lost in Ahab's daughter.

Now he pays for his kind alliance; accompanying the son of Ahab in his death, whom he consorted with in his idolatry. Young Ahaziah was scarce warm in his throne, when the mismatched blood of Athaliah is required from

him. Nothing is more dangerous, than to be imped in a wicked family: this relation too often draws in a share, both of sin and punishment.

Who would not have looked, that Jezebel, hearing of this bloody end of her son and pursuit of her ally and the fearful proceedings of this prosperous conspiracy, should have put herself into sackcloth and ashes; and now, finding no means either of defence or escape, should have cast herself into such a posture of humiliation, as might have moved the compassion of Jehu? Her proud heart could not suddenly learn to stoop: rather, she recollects her high spirits; and, instead of humbling her soul by repentance and addressing herself for an imminent death, she pranks up her old carcass and paints her wrinkled face, and, as one that vainly hopes to daunt the courage of a usurper by the sudden beams of majesty, she looks out, and thinks to fright him with the challenge of a traitor, whose either mercy or justice could not be avoided. Extremity finds us such, as our peace leaves us. Our last thoughts are spent on that we care most for. Those, that have regarded their face more than their soul, in their latter end are more taken up, with desire of seeming fair, than being happy. It is no marvel, if a heart obdured with the custom of sin shut up gracelessly. Counterfeit beauty agrees well, with inward uncleanness.

Jehu's resolution was too strongly settled, to be removed with a painted face, or an opprobrious tongue. He looks up to the window, and says, 'Who is on my side, Who?' There want not those every where, which will be ready to observe prevailing greatness. Two or three eunuchs look out. He bids them, 'Throw her down.' They instantly lay hold on their lately-adored mistress; and, notwithstanding all her shrieks and prayers, cast her down headlong into the street.

What heed is to be taken, of the deep-professed services of hollow-hearted followers! All this while, they have humbly, with smiles and officious devotions, fawned on their great queen: now, on the call of a prosperous enemy, they forget their respects, her royalty; and cast her down, as willing executioners, into the jaws of a fear-

ful death. It is hard for greatness to know them, whom it may trust. Perhaps the fairest semblance is from the falsest heart.

It was a just plague of God on wicked Jezebel, that she was inwardly hated of her own. He, whose servants she persecuted, raised up enemies to her, from her own elbow.

Thus must pride fall. Insolent, idolatrous, cruel Jezebel besprinkles the walls and pavement with her blood; and now those brains, that devised mischief against the servants of God, are strawed on the stones; and she, that insulted on the prophets, is trampled on by the horses' heels: 'The wicked is kept for the day of destruction, and shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.'

Death puts an end, commonly, to the highest displeasure. He, that was severe in the execution of the living, is merciful in the sepulture of the dead; 'Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king's daughter.' She, that upbraided Jehu with the name of Zimri, shall be interred by Jehu as Omri's daughter-in-law, as a Sidonian princess. Somewhat must be yielded to humanity; somewhat, to state.

The dogs have prevented Jehu in his purpose; and have given her a living tomb, more ignoble than the worst of the earth. Only the scull, hands, and feet, of that vanished carcass yet remain: the scull, which was the roof of all her wicked devices; the hands and feet, which were the executioners. These shall remain, as the monuments of those shameful exequies; that future times, seeing these fragments of a body, might say, 'The dogs were worthy of the rest.' Thus, Jezebel is turned to dung, and dogs-meat; Elijah is verified; Naboth is revenged; Jezreel is purged; Jehu is zealous; and in all, God is just.—2 Kings ix.

JEHU KILLING THE SONS OF AHAB, AND THE PRIESTS OF BAAL.

There were two prime cities of the ten tribes, which were the set courts of the kingdom of Israel; Samaria and Jezreel. The chief palace of the kingdom, was Jezreel; the mother city of the kingdom, was Samaria. Jehu

is possessed of the one, without any sword drawn against him: Jezreel willingly changes the master; yielding itself to the victor of two kings, to the avenger of Jezebel. The next care is Samaria: either policy or force shall fetch in that head of the tribes.

The plentiful issue of princes, is no small assurance to the people. Ahab had sons enough, to furnish the thrones of all the neighbor nations; to maintain the hopes of succession, to all times. How secure did he think the perpetuation of his posterity, when he saw seventy sons from his own loins! Neither was this royal issue trusted, either to weak walls or to one roof, but to the strong bulwarks of Samaria, and therein to the several guards of the chief peers. It was the wise care of their parents, not to have them obnoxious to the danger of a common miscarriage, or of those emulations which wait on the cloyedness of an undivided conversation; but to order their separation so, as one may rescue other from the peril of assault, as one may respect other out of a familiar strangeness. Had Ahab and Jezebel been as wise for their souls, as they were for their seed, both had prospered.

Jehu is yet but in his first act. If all the sons of Ahab bleed not, the prophecy is unanswered.

There shall be no need of his sword: his pen shall work all this slaughter. He writes a challenge to Samaria, and therein to the guardians of these sons of Ahab; daring them, out of the confidence in their defenced city, in their chariots and horses, in their associates and arms, to set up the best of their master's sons on his father's throne, and to fight for his succession.

All the governors of Ahab's children conspire in one common fear. No doubt, there wanted not, in that numerous brood of kings, some great spirits, that, if at least they attained to the notice of this design, longed for a revenge; and suggested counsels of resolution to their cowardly guardians: 'Shall an audacious usurper run thus away with the crown of Israel? Shall the blood of Jezebel be thus traitorously spilt, thus wilfully forgotten? O Israelites, can you be so base, as to be ruled by my father's servant? Where are the merits of Ahab and Jehoram? What is become of the loyal courage of Israel?

Doubtless, ye shall not want able seconds to your valor. Do ye think the royal and potent alliances of our mother Jezebel, and the remaining heirs of Judah, can draw back their hands from your aid? Will they endure to swallow so cruel an indignity? Stir up your astonished fortitude, O ye nobles of Israel. Redeem your bleeding honor. Revenge this treacherous conspirator; and establish the right of the undoubted heirs of your sovereign.' But, as warm clothes to a dead man, so are the motions of valor to a fearful heart: 'Behold, two kings stood not before him, how then shall we stand?'

Fear affrights itself, rather than it will want bugs of terror. It is true, two kings fell before Jehu; but, two kings unarmed, unguarded. Had not the surprisal of Jehu taken advantage of the unsuspicious nakedness of these two princes, his victory had not been thus successful, thus easy. Half one of those two kings, on advertisement and preparation, had abated the fury of that hot leader.

It is the fashion of fear, to represent unto us always the worst, in every event; not looking at the inequality of the advantages, but the misery of the success: as, contrarily, it is the guise of faith and valor, by the good issue of one enterprise to raise up the heart, to an expectation and assurance of more.

These men's hearts are dead with their kings; neither dare entertain the hope of a safe and prosperous resistance, but basely return, 'We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king; do thou that which is good in thine eyes.'

Well may Jehu think, 'These men, which are thus disloyal to their charge, cannot be faithful to me. It is their fear, that draws them to this observation. Were they not cowards, they would not be traitors to their princes, subjects to me. I may use their hands, but I will not trust them. It is a thankless obedience, that is grounded on fear. There can be no true fidelity, without love and reverence.' Neither is it other, betwixt God and us. If out of a dread of hell we be officious, who shall thank us, for these respects to ourselves?

As one that had tasted already the sweetness of a reso-

lute expedition, Jehu writes back instantly, 'If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel to-morrow this time.' Valiant Jehu was so well acquainted with the nature of fear, that he well knew, this passion, once grown desperate, would be ready to swallow all conditions; so far therefore doth his wisdom improve it, as to make these peers his executioners; who, presently, on the receipt of his charge, turn cruel; and, by a joint consent, fetch off the seventy heads of those princes, whom they undertook to guard, whom they had flattered with the hopes of greater honor.

No doubt, but amongst so many sons of Ahab, some had so demeaned themselves, that they had won zealous professions of love from their guardians. Except perhaps death stole on them in sleep, what tears, what entreaties, what conjurations, must here needs have been! 'What have we done, O ye peers of Israel, that might deserve this bloody measure? We are the sons of Ahab; therefore have ye hitherto professed to observe us. What change is this? Why should that, which hath hitherto kept you loyal, now make you cruel? Is this the reward of the long peaceable government of our father? Are these the trophies of Ahab's victories against Benhadad; Jehoram's, against Hazael? If we may not reign, yet, at least, let us live: or, if we must die, why will your hands be imbrued in that blood, which ye had wont to term royal and sacred? Why will ye, of tutors, turn murderers?'

All pleas are in vain to them, that are deafened with their own fears. Perhaps, these expostulations might have fetched some dews of pity from the eyes, and kisses from the lips, of these unfaithful tutors, but cannot prevent the stroke of death. These crocodiles weep on those, whom they must kill; and, if their own sons had been in the place of Ahab's, doubtless they had been sacrificed to the will of a usurper, to the parents' safety.

It is ill relying on timorous natures: on every occasion, those crazy reeds will break, and run into our hands.

How worthy were Ahab and Jezebel of such friends! They had been ever false to God; how should men be

true to them! They had sold themselves to work wickedness, and now they are requited with a mercenary fidelity: for a few lines, have these men sold all the heads of Ahab's posterity. Could ever the policy of Jezebel have reached so far, as to suspect the possibility of the extirpation of so ample an issue in one night, by the hands of her trustiest subjects?

Now she, that, by her letter sent to the elders of Jezreel, shed the blood of Naboth and his sons, hath the blood of all her sons shed, by a letter sent from Jezreel to the elders of Samaria. At last, God will be sure to come out of the debt of wicked sinners; and will pay them with that coin, which is both most proper and least looked for.

Early in the morning, in that gate of Jezreel where Ahab had passed many an unjust sentence, is presented unto Jehu the fearful pledge of his sovereignty, seventy ghastly heads of the sons of Ahab.

Some carnal eye, that had seen so many young and smooth faces besmeared with blood, would have melted into compassion; bemoaning their harmless age, their untimely end. It is not for the justice of God, to stand at the bar of our corrupted judgment. Except we include some grandchildren of Ahab within this number, none of these died before they were seasoned with horrible idolatry; or if they had, they were in the loins of Ahab, when he sold himself to work wickedness; and now it is just with God, to punish Ahab's wickedness in this fruit of his loins. The holy severity of God in the revenge of sin sometimes goes so far, that our ignorance is ready to mistake it for cruelty.

The wonder, and horror, of those two heaps hath easily drawn together the people of Jezreel. Jehu meets them, in that seat of public judgment; and, finding much amazedness and passionate confusion in their faces, he clears them, and sends them to the true original of these sudden and astonishing massacres. However his own conspiracy, and the cowardly treachery of the princes of Israel, had been (not without their heinous sin) the visible means of this judgment, yet he directs their eyes to a higher authority; the just decree of the Almighty, manifested by his servant Elijah; who, even by the willing sins of men,

can most wisely, most hostilely, fetch about his most righteous and blessed purposes. If the peers of Samaria, out of a base fear, if Jehu, out of an ambition of reigning, shed the foul blood of Ahab's posterity, the sin is their own; but, in the meantime, the act is no other, than what the infinite justice of God would justly work by their misintentions.

Let these Israelites but look up from earth to heaven, these tragical changes cannot trouble them. Thither Jehu sends them: wiping off the envy of all this blood by the warrant of the divine preordination: in obedience whereunto, he sends after these heirs of Ahab, all his kinsfolks, favorites, priests, that remained in Jezreel.

And now, having cleared these coasts, he hastens to Samaria. Whom should he meet with in the way, but the brethren of Ahaziah, king of Judah? They are going to visit their cousins, the sons of Ahab. This young troop was thinking of nothing but jollity and courtly entertainment, when they meet with death. So suddenly, so secretly, had Jehu dispatched these bold executions, that these princes could imagine no cause of suspicion. How could they think it might be dangerous to be known for the brethren of Ahaziah, or friends to the brethren of Jehoram? The just providence of the Almighty hath brought all this covey under one net. Jehu thinks it not safe, to let go so many avengers of Ahaziah's blood, so many corivals of his sovereignty.

The unhappy affinity of Jehoshaphat with Ahab is no less guilty of this slaughter, than Jehu's ambition; this match, by the inoculation of one bud, hath tainted all the sap of the house of Judah. The two-and-forty brethren of Ahaziah are therefore sent after the seventy sons of Ahab; that they may overtake them in death, whom they came to visit. God will much less brook idolatry from the loins of Jehoshaphat. Our entireness with wicked men feoffs us, both in their sins and judgments.

Doubtless, many Israelites, that were devoted to the family and allies of Ahab, looked (what they durst) awry at this common effusion of royal blood; yet in the worst of the depravedness of Israel, there were some, which both drooped under the deplored idolatry of the times,

and congratulated to Jehu this severe vindication of God's inheritance.

Amongst the rest, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, was most eminent. That man was by descent derived from Jethro; a Midianite by nation, but incorporated into Israel; a man, whose piety and strict conversation did both teach and shame those twelve tribes, to which he was joined. He was the author of an austere rule of civility to his posterity; to whom he debarred the use of wine, cities, possessions. This old and rough friend of Jehu (out of his moving habitations) meets him, and applauds his success. He, that allowed not wine to his seed, allows the blood of Ahab's seed poured out, by the hand of Jehu. He, that shunned the city, is carried in Jehu's chariot, to the palace of Samaria.

How easily might Jehu have been deceived! Many a one professes uprightness, who yet is all guile. Jonadab's carriage hath been such, that his word merits trust. It is a blessing on the plain-hearted, that they can be believed. Honest Jonadab is admitted to the honor of Jehu's seat; and called, instead of many, to witness the zeal of the new-anointed king of Israel.

While Jehu had to do with kings, his cunning and his courage held equal pace together; but now that he is to deal with idolatrous priests, his will goes alone, and prevails. He calls the people together; and, dissembling his intentions, says, 'Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much: now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting; for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live.'

What a dead paleness was there now in the faces of those few true-hearted Israelites, that looked for a happy restoration of the religion of God! How could they choose but think; 'Alas, how are we fallen from our hopes! Is this the change we looked for? Was it only ambition, that hath set this edge on the sword of Jehu? It was not the person of Ahab that we disliked, but the sins: if those must still succeed, what have we gained? Wo be to us, if only the author of our misery be changed, not the condition, not the cause of our misery!'

On the other side, what insultations and triumphs sounded every where, of the joyful Baalites! what glorying of the truth of their profession, because of the success! what scorns of their dejected opposites! what exprobrations of the disappointed hopes and predictions of their adverse prophets! what promises to themselves, of a perpetuity to Baalism! How did the dispersed priests of Baal now flock together, and applaud each other's happiness, and magnify the devotions of their new sovereign! Never had that idol so glorious a day as this, for the pomp of his service; before, he was adored singly in the corners; now, solemn sacrifices shall be offered to him by all his clients, in the great temple of the mother city of Israel.

I can commend the zeal of Jehu; I cannot commend the fraud of Jehu: we may come to our end, even by crooked ways. He, that bade him to smite for him, did not bid him to lie for him. Falsehood, though it be but tentative, is neither needed nor approved by the God of truth: if policy have allowed officious untruths, religion never.

By this device the house of Baal is well furnished, well filled. Not one of his Chemarim either might or would be absent: not one of those which were present might be unrobed. False gods have ever affected to imitate the true. Even Baal hath temples, altars, priests, vestments. All religions have allotted peculiar habits to their highest devotions. Those vestments, which they miscalled sacred, are brought forth and put on for the glory of this service.

Jehu and Jonadab are first careful, that this separation be exact. They search and see, that no servant of the Lord be crept into that throng. What should a religious Israelite do in the temple of Baal? Were any such there, he had deserved their smart, who would partake with their worship; but if curiosity should have drawn any thither, the mercy of Jehu seeks his rescue. How much more favorable is the God of mercies, in not taking advantage of our infirmities!

Well might this search have bred suspicion, were it not that in all those idolatrous sacrifices, the first care was to avoid the profane. Even Baal would admit no mixture; how should the true God abide it!

Nothing wanted now, but the sacrifice: no doubt,

whole herds and flocks were ready, for a pretence of some royal hecatombs; whereof some had now already smoked on their altars.

O Jehu, what means this dilation? If thou abhorrest Baal, why didst thou give way to this last sacrifice? Why didst thou not cut off these idolaters, before this upshot of their wickedness? Was it, that thou mightest be sure of their guiltiness? Was it, that their number, together with their sin, might be complete?

What acclamations were here to Baal; what joy, in the freedom of their revived worship! When all on the sudden, those, that had sacrificed, are sacrificed. The soldiers of Jehu, by his appointment, rush in, with their swords drawn, and turn the temple into a slaughter-house.

How is the tune now changed! What shrieking was here! what outcries! what running from one sword, to the edge of another! what scrambling up the walls and pillars! what climbing into the windows! what vain endeavors to escape that death, which would not be shunned! Whether running, or kneeling, or prostrate, they must die.

The first part of the sacrifice was Baal's; the latter is God's. The blood of beasts was offered in the one, of men, in the other: the shedding of this was so much more acceptable to God, by how much these men were more beasts, than those they sacrificed.

Oh happy obedience! God was pleased with a sacrifice from the house of Baal: the idolaters are slain; the idols burnt; the house of Baal turned to a draught (though even thus less unclean, less noisome, than in the former perfumes); and, in one word, Baal is destroyed out of Israel.

Who, that had seen all this zeal for God, would not have said, 'Jehu is a true Israelite?' Yet, he, that rooted out Ahab, would not be rid of Jeroboam: he, that destroyed Baal, maintained the two calves of Dan and Bethel. That idolatry was of a lower rank, as being a misworship of the true God; whereas the other was a worship of the false. Even the easier of both is heinous; and shall rob Jehu of the praise of his uprightness. A false heart may laudably quit itself of some one gross sin, and, in the mean time, hug some lesser evil that may

condemn it; as a man recovered of a fever may die of a jaundice or a dropsy. We lose the thank of all, if we wilfully fault in one.

It is an entire goodness, that God cares for. Perhaps, such is the bounty of our God, a partial obedience may be rewarded, with a temporal blessing; as Jehu's severity to Ahab shall carry the crown to his seed, for four generations: but we can never have any comfortable assurance of an eternal retribution, if our hearts and ways be not perfect with God. Wo be to us, O God, if we be not all thine. We cannot but everlastingly depart from thee, if we depart not from every sin. Thou hast purged our hearts from the Baal of our gross idolatries, O clear us from the golden calves of our petty corruptions also; that thou mayest take pleasure in our uprightness, and we may reap the sweet comforts of thy glorious remuneration.—2 Kings x.

ATHALIAH AND JOASH.

Oh the woful ruins of the house of good Jehoshaphat! Jehu hath slain two-and-forty of his issue; Athaliah hopes to root out the rest. This daughter of Ahab was not like to be other than fatal to that holy line. One drop of that wicked blood was enough, both to impure and spill all the rest, which affinity had mixed with it.

It is not unlike that Ahaziah, betaking himself to the society of Jehoram's wars, committed the sway of his sceptre to his mother Athaliah. The daughter of Jezebel cannot but be plotting. When she hears of the death of Ahaziah and his brethren, inflicted by the heavy hand of Jehu, she straight casts for the kingdom of Judah. The true heirs are infants: their minority gives her both color of rule, and opportunity of an easy extirpation. Perhaps, her ambition was not more guilty, than her zeal of Baalism: she saw Jehu, out of a detestation of idolatry, trampling on the blood of Jehoram, Jezebel, Ahaziah, the sons of Ahab, the brethren of Ahaziah, the priests and prophets of Baal, and, in one word, triumphing in the destruction both of Ahab and his gods, out of Israel; and now she thinks, 'Why should not I destroy Jehoshaphat and his God, out of Judah?'

Who ever saw an idolater, that was not cruel? Athaliah must needs let out some of her own blood, out of the throat of Ahaziah's sons; yet she spares not to shed it, out of a thirst of sovereignty,

O God, how worthy of wonder are thy just and merciful dispensations; in that, thou sufferest the seed of good Jehoshaphat to be destroyed by her hand, in whose affinity he offended, and yet savest one branch of this stock of Jehoshaphat, for the sake of so faithful a progenitor!

Wicked Athaliah, couldst thou think God would so far forget his servant David, though no other of those loins had seconded his virtues, as to suffer all his seed to be rooted out of the earth? This vengeance was not for thy father Ahab. The man according to God's own heart shall have a lineal heir, to succeed in his throne, when thou and thy father's house shall have vanished into forgetfulness.

For this purpose, hath the wise providence of God ordained a Jehosheba, and matched her in the priestly tribe. Such reverence did Jehoram, king of Judah, though degenerated into the idolatry of his father-in-law Ahab, bear to this sacred function, that he marries his daughter to Jehoida, the priest. Even princesses did not then scorn the bed of those that served at God's altar. Why should the Gospel pour contempt on that, which the Law honored?

That good lady had too much of Jehoshaphat in her, to suffer the utter extirpation of that royal seed. She could not, doubtless, without the extreme danger of her own life, save the life of her nephew Joash. With what a loving boldness doth she adventure to steal him, from amongst those bleeding carcasses, in the chamber of death! Her match gave her opportunity to effect that, which both nature and religion moved her to attempt. Neither know I, whether more to wonder at the cunning of the device, or the courage of the enterprise, or the secresy of the concealment, or the happiness of the success.

Certainly, Athaliah was too cruelly careful, to forget this so late-born son of Ahaziah: of all the rest, his age would not suffer him to be out of her eye: in all likelihood

therefore, she must needs have missed so noted a corpse, had there not been a substitution of some other dead child in his room. In that age, the favor is not so distinguishable; especially of a dead face. Without some pious deceit, this work could never have been effected. Else, had the child been secretly subduced, and misled by his bloody grandmother, her perpetual jealousy had both expected a surviving heir, and continued a curious and unavoidable search; both which were now shunned at once, while Athaliah reckons him for dead whom Jehosheba hath preserved. Mischief sometimes fails of those appointments, wherein it thinks to have made the surest work. God laughs in heaven, at the plots of tyrants; and befools them, in their deepest projects. He had said to David, 'Of the fruit of thy body, will I set upon thy seat:' in vain shall earth and hell conspire to frustrate it.

Six years hath Joash, and his nurse, been hid in a close cell of the temple. Those rooms were destined only to the holy tribe; yet now rejoice to harbor such a guest. The rigor of the ordinary law must yield to cases of so important necessity.

All this could not possibly be done and continued, without the privity of many faithful priests and Levites; who were as careful to keep this counsel, as hopeful of the issue of it. It is not hard for many honest hearts, to agree in a religious secresy: needs must those lips be shut, which God had sealed up.

Judah had not been used to such a yoke. Long had it groaned under the tyranny, not of a woman only, but of an idolatrous Sidonian: if any of that sex might have claimed that sceptre, none had so much right to it, as Jehosheba herself; but good Jehoiada the priest, who would rather be a loyal guardian to the king, than a husband to a queen, now finds time to set on foot the just title of Joash, and to put him into the misusurped throne of his father Ahaziah.

In the seventh year, therefore, he sends for the captains and the guard; and having sworn them secresy, by undoubted witnesses makes faith unto them of the truth of their native prince, thus happily rescued from the bloody

knife of his merciless grandmother; marshals the great business of his inauguration; gives every one his charge; sets every one his station; and so disposes of his holy forces, as was most needful for the safety of the king, the revenge of the usurper, the prevention of tumults, the establishment of the crown on the owner's head in peace and joy.

There was no one of all these agents, who did not hold the business to be his own. Every true subject of Judah was feelingly interested in this service; neither was there any of them, who was not secretly heart-burned all this while, with the hateful government of this idolatrous tyranness: and now, this inward fire is glad to find a vent. How gladly do they address themselves to this welcome employment!

The greatest part of this secret band were Levites; who might therefore both meet together with least suspicion, and be more securely trusted by Jehoiada, under whom they served. Even that holy priest of God, instead of teaching the law, sets the guard, orders the captains, ranges the troops of Judah; and, instead of a censer, brings the spears and shields of David. The temple is, for the present, a field or an artillery-yard, and the ephods are turned into harness. That house, in the rearing whereof not the noise of a hammer might be heard, now admits of the clashing of armor, and the secret murmurs of some military achievement. No circumstances, either of place or calling, are so punctual, as that public necessity may not dispense with their alteration.

All things are now ready for this solemnity. Each man rejoices, to fix on his own footing; and longs to see the face of their long-concealed sovereign; and vows his blood to the vindication of the common liberty, to the punishment of a cruel intruder. Now Jehoiada brings forth unto them the king's son, and presents him to the peers and people. Hardly can the multitude contain itself, from shouting out too soon. One sees in his countenance the features of his father, Ahaziah; another, of his grandfather, Jehoram; a third professes to discern in him some lines and fashion of his great grandfather, Jehoshaphat; all find in his face the natural impressions of

majesty; and read in it the hopes, yea the prophecies, of their future happiness.

Not with more joy than speed doth Jehoiada accomplish all the rites of the coronation. Before that young king could know what was done to him, he is anointed, crowned, presented with the book of the law.

Those ceremonies were instructive; and, no doubt, Jehoiada failed not to comment on them, in due time, to that royal pupil.

The oil, wherewith he was anointed, signified his designation to that high service; and those endowments from heaven, that might enable him to so great a function.

The crown, wherewith he was adorned, signified that glory and majesty, which should both encourage and attend his princely cares.

The book of the testimony signified the divine rules and directions, whereto he must frame his heart and actions, in wielding of that crown, in the improvement of that oil.

These three, the oil, the crown, the testimony, that is, inward powers, outward magnificence, true piety and justice, make up a perfect prince. None of these may be wanting. If there be not a due calling of God, and abilities meet for that greatness, the oil faileth: if there be not a majestic grace and royalty that may command reverence, the crown is missing: if there be not a careful respect to the law of God, as the absolute guide of all counsels and determinations, the testimony is neglected: all of them concurring, make both king and people happy.

Now is it time for the people to clap their hands, and by their loud acclamations to witness their joy; which must needs break forth with so much more force, by how much it was longer, on fears and policy, suppressed.

The court and temple were near together. However it was with Athaliah and the late revolted princes of Judah, according to the common word, the nearer to the church, the further from God; their religious predecessors held it the greatest commodity of their house, that it neighbored on the house of God.

From her palace, might Athaliah easily hear the joyful shouts of the multitude, the loud noise of the trumpets; and, as astonished with this new tumult of public gratulations, she comes running into the temple. Never had her foot trod on that holy pavement, till now that she came to fetch a just revenge from that God, whose worship she had contemned.

It fell out well, that her sudden amazedness called her forth, without the attendance of any strong guard; whose side-taking might have made that quarrel mutually bloody.

She soon hears and sees, what she likes not. Her ear meets with, 'God save the king:' her eye meets with the unlooked-for heir of the kingdom; sitting on his throne, crowned and robed in the royal fashion, guarded with the captains and soldiers, proclaimed by the trumpeters, acclaimed and applauded by the people.

Who can say, whether this sight drave her more near to frenzy or death? How could it be otherwise, when those great spirits of hers, that had been long used to an uncontrolled sovereignty, find themselves so unexpectedly suppressed?

She now rends her clothes, and cries, 'Treason, Treason;' as if that voice of hers could still command all hearts, all hands; as if one breath of hers were powerful enough, to blow away all these new designs.

O Athaliah, to whom dost thou complain thyself? They are thy just executioners, wherewith thou art encompassed. If it be treason to set up the true heir of Ahaziah, thou appealest to thy traitors. The treason was thine; theirs is justice. The time is now come, of thy reckonings for all the royal blood of Judah, which thine ambition shed. Wonder, rather, at the patience of this long forbearance, than the rigor of this execution.

There needs no formal seat of justice, in so apparent offence. Jehoiada passes the sentence of death on her; 'Have her forth of the ranges; let her not be slain in the house of the Lord; and him, that followeth her, kill with the sword.'

Had not this usurpation been palpable, Jehoiada would not have presumed to intermeddle: now, being both the priest of God and uncle and protector to the lawful king,

he doth that, out of the necessity of the state, which his infant sovereign, if he could have been capable of those thoughts, would have desired.

Violent hands are laid on Athaliah; whom, no doubt, a proud and furious disdain of so quick a charge and of so rough a usage, made miserably impatient. Now she frowns, and calls, and shrieks, and commands, and threatens, and reviles, and entreats, in vain; and dies with as much ill-will from herself, as she lived with the ill-will of her repining subjects.

I see not any one man, of all her late flatterers, that follows her, either for pity or rescue. Every man willingly gives her up to justice: not one sword is drawn in her defence: not one eye laments her. Such is the issue of a tyrannical misgovernment. That, which is obeyed not without secret hate, is lost not without public joy.

How like is Athaliah to her mother Jezebel; as in conditions and carriage, so even in death: both killed violently; both killed under their own walls; both slain with treason in their mouths; both slain in the entrance of a changed government; one trod on by the horses, the other slain in the horse-gate! Both paid their own blood, for the innocent blood of others.

How suddenly, how easily, is Judah restored to itself, after so long and so fearful a depravation! The people scarce believe their own eyes, for the wonder of this happy change; neither know I, whether they be more joyed in the sight of their new king thus strangely preserved, or in the sight of Jehoiada that had preserved him.

No man can envy the protection of the young king unto him, by whose means he lives and reigns.

That holy man cares only, to improve his authority to the common good. He makes 'a covenant between the Lord, and the king, and the people;' and, after so long and dangerous a disjunction, reunites them to each other. Their revived zeal bestirs itself, and breaks down the temples, and altars, and images of Baal, and sacrifices his idolatrous priests. Shortly, both Ahab, and Baal, is destroyed out of Judah.

The sceptre of Judah is changed from a woman to a

child; but, a child, trained up and tutored by Jehoiada. This minority so guided was not inferior to the mature age of many predecessors. Happy is that land, the nonage of whose princes falls into holy and just hands.

Yet even these holy and just hands came short of what they might have done. The high places remained still. Those altars were erected to the true God, but in a wrong place. It is a marvel, if there be not some blemishes found in the best government. I doubt Jehoiada shall once buy it dear, that he did not his utmost.

But for the main, all was well with Judah, in all the days of Jehoiada; even after that Joash was grown past his pupillage. He, that was the tutor to his infancy, was the counsellor of his ripe age; and was equally happy in both.

How pleasing was it to that good high-priest, to be commanded by that charge of his, in the business of God! The young king gives order to the priests, for the collection of large sums; to the repairing of the breaches of God's house. It becomes him well, to take care of that, which was the nursery of his infancy. And now, after three-and-twenty years, he expostulates with his late guardian, Jehoiada, and the rest of his court, 'Why repair ye not the breaches?

Oh gracious and happy vicissitude! Jehoiada the priest had ruled the infancy of king Joash in matters of state, and now Joash the king commands aged Jehoiada the priest in matter of devotion. In the affairs of God, the action is the priest's; the oversight, and coaction, is the prince's: by the careful endeavor of both, God's house is repaired, his service florisheth.

But alas! that it may too well appear, that the ground of this devotion was not altogether inward, no sooner doth the life of Jehoiada cease, than the devotion of Joash begins to languish; and, after some languor, dies. The benefit of a truly religious prelate or statesman, is not known till his loss.

Now some idolatrous peers of Judah have soon miscarried the king, from the house of the Lord God of their fathers, to serve groves and idols. Yea, whither go we wretched men, if we be left by our Maker? King Joash is turned,

not idolater only, but persecutor; yea, which is yet more horrible to consider, persecutor of the son of that Jehoiada, to whom he owes his own life. Zechariah his cousin-german, his foster-brother, the holy issue of those parents by whom Joash lives and reigns, for the conscionable rebuke of the idolatry of prince and people, is unjustly and cruelly murdered by that unthankful hand! How possible is it, for fair and saint-like beginnings, to shut up in monstrous impieties! 'Let him, that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.'

When did God ever put up so foul ingratitude to himself, to his servants? Oh Joash, what eyes can pity the fearful destruction of thee and thy Judah? If ye have forgotten the kindness of Jehoiada, your unkindness to Jehoiada shall not be forgotten. A small army of Syrians came up against Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people, and sent all the spoil of them to Damascus. Now Hazael revenges this quarrel of God and his anointed; and plagues that people, which made themselves unworthy to be the Lord's inheritance.

And what becomes of Joash? He is 'left in great diseases,' when 'his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada, and slew him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him not in the sepulchre of the kings.'

Dying Zechariah had said, in the bitterness of his departing soul, 'The Lord look upon it, and require it.' I confess, I would rather to have heard him say, 'The Lord pass it over, and remit it;' so said Stephen: such difference there is, between a martyr of the Law, and of the Gospel: although I will hope the zeal of justice, not the uncharitable heat of revenge, drew forth this word.

God hears it, and now gives an account of his notice. Thus doth the Lord require the blood of Jehoiada's son, even by the like unthankful hand of the obliged servants of Joash. He, that was guilty of abominable idolatry, yet, as if God meant to wave that challenge, is called to reckoning, for his cruel unthankfulness to Jehoiada. This crime shall make him odious alive, and shall abandon him dead from the sepulchre of his fathers; as if this last

royalty were too good for him, who had forgotten the law of humanity.

Some vices are such, as nature smiles on, though frowned at by divine justice: others are such, as even nature itself abhors; such is this of ingratitude, which therefore carries so much more detestation from God, as it is more odious even to them that have blotted out the image of God.—2 Kings xi. xii. 2 Chron. xxii. xxiii. xxiv.

JOASH, WITH ELISHA DYING.

The two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, however divided both in government and affection, yet loved to interchange the names of their kings.

Even Israel also had their Joash, no better than that of Judah. He was not more the father of a later Jeroboam, than, in respect of misworship, he was the son of the first Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin. Those calves of Dan and Bethel, out of a politic misdevotion, besotted all the succession of the ten usurped tribes: yet even this idolatrous king of Israel comes down to visit the sick bed of Elisha, and weeps on his face.

That holy prophet was never any flatterer of princes; neither spared he invectives against their most plausible sins: yet king Joash, that was beaten by his reproofs, washes that face with the tears of love and sorrow, which had often frowned on his wickedness.

How much difference there was, betwixt the Joash of Israel, and the Joash of Judah! That of Judah, having been preserved and nurtured by Jehoiada the priest, after all professions of dearness shuts up in the unkind murder of his son; and that merely for the just reproof of his own idolatry: this of Israel, having been estranged from the prophet Elisha, and sharply rebuked for the like offence, makes love to his dying reprover, and bedews his pale face with his tears. Both were bad enough; but this of Israel was, however vicious, yet good-natured: that of Judah, added to his wickedness, an ill disposition, a dogged humor. There are varieties even of evil men: some are worse at the root, others at the branch; some more civilly harmless, others fouler in morality. Accord-

ing to the exercise of the restraining grace, natural men do either rise or fall in their ill.

The longest day must have his evening. Good Elisha, that had lived some ninety years, a wonder of prophets, and had outworn many successions in the thrones of Israel and Judah, is now cast on the bed of his sickness, yea, of his death. That very age might seem a disease; which yet is seconded with a languishing distemper. It is not in the power of any holiness, to privilege us from infirmity of body, from final dissolution. He, that stretched himself on his bed, over the dead carcass of the Shunamite's son, and revived it, must now stretch out his own limbs on his sick bed, and die. He saw his master Elijah rapt up suddenly from the earth, and fetched by a fiery chariot from this vale of mortality; himself must leisurely wait for his last pangs, in a lingering passage to the same glory.

There is not one way appointed to us, by the Divine Providence, unto one common blessedness. One hath more pain; another hath more speed: violence snatcheth away one; another, by an insensible pace, draws every day nearer to his term. The wisdom, and goodness, of God magnifies itself in both. Happy is he, that, after due preparation, is passed through the gates of death, ere he be aware. Happy is he, that, by the holy use of long sickness, is taught to see the gates of death afar off, and is addressed for a resolute passage: the one dies like Elijah; the other, like Elisha; both, blessedly.

The time was, when a great king sent to Elisha, to know if he should recover: now, the king of Israel, as knowing that Elisha shall not recover (so had his consumption spent him), comes to visit the dying prophet; and, when his tears would give him leave, breaks forth into a passionate exclamation, 'O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.'

Yet the calves of Dan and Bethel have left some goodness in Joash. As the best man hath something in him worthy of reproof, so the faultiest hath something commendable. Had not the Spirit of God himself told us, that Joash did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, we had admired this piety, this reverent respect to the

prophet. The holiest man could not have said more. It is possible for the clients of a false worship, to honor, out of another regard, the professors of truth. From the hand of Elisha, had Jehu, the grandfather of Joash, received his unction to the kingdom: this favor might not be forgotten.

Visitation of the sick is a duty required, both by the law of humanity and of religion: bodily infirmity is sad and comfortless; and therefore needs the presence and counsel of friends, to relieve it: although, when we draw the curtains of those that are eminently gracious, we do rather fetch, with Joash, than bring a blessing.

How sensible should we be of the loss of holy men, when a Joash spends his tears on Elisha! If we be more affected, with the foregoing of a natural friend or kinsman, than of a noted and useful prophet, it argues more love to ourselves, than to the church of God, than to God himself.

What use there was of chariots and horsemen in those wars of the ancient, all histories can tell us: all the strength of the battle stood in these: there could be neither defence nor offence, but by them. Such was Elisha unto Israel. The greatest safeguard to any nation is the sanctity, and faithfulness, of their prophets; without which, the church, and state, lies open to utter desolation.

The same words, that Elisha said of his master Elijah, when he saw him taken up from the earth, doth Joash now speak of Elisha, near his dissolution; 'O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!'

The words were good; the tears were pious; but where are the actions? O Joash, if the prophet were thy father, where was thy filial obedience? He cried down thy calves; thou upheldest them: he counselled thee to good; thou didst evil in the sight of the Lord. If the prophet were the chariots and horsemen of Israel, why didst thou fight against his holy doctrine? If thou weepest for his loss, why didst thou not weep for those sins of thine, that procured it? Had thy hand answered thy tongue, Israel had been happy in Elisha; Elisha had

been happy in Israel, and thee. Words are no good trial of profession: the worst men may speak well: actions only have the power to descry hypocrites.

Yet even a Joash, thus complying, shall not go away unblessed. This outward kindness shall receive an outward retribution: these few drops of warm water shed on the face of a prophet, shall not lose their reward.

The spirit of prophecy forsakes not the death-bed of Elisha. He calls for bow and arrows, and puts them into the hand of Joash; and, putting his hands on the king's hand, he bids to shoot eastward, and, while the shaft flies and lights, he says, 'The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou hast consumed them.'

If the weak and withered hand of the prophet had not been on the youthful and vigorous hand of the king, this bow had been drawn in vain. The strength was from the hand of the king; the blessing, from the hand of the prophet. He, whose real parable hath made the earth to be Syria; the arrow, revenge; the archer, Joash; hath obtained for his last boon from God to Israel, that this archer shall shoot this arrow of revenge, into the heart of Syria, and wound it to death. When then the hand of the king, and of the prophet, draws together, there cannot choose but success must follow.

How readily doth Elisha now make good the words of Joash! How truly is he the chariots and horsemen of Israel! Israel had not fought without him, much less had been victorious. If theirs be the endeavor, the success is his. Even the dying prophet puts life and speed into the forces of Israel; and, while he is digging his own grave, is raising trophies to God's people.

He had received kindness from the Syrians: amongst them was he harbored in the dearth, and from some of their nobles was presented with rich gifts; but their enmity to Israel drowns all his private respects: he cannot but profess hostility to the public enemies of the church.

Neither can he content himself with a single prediction of their ruin. He bids Joash, to take the arrows and smite on the ground. He sets no number of those strokes; as supposing the frequence of those blows, which Joash

might well, on this former parabolical act, understand to be significant.

The slack hand of the king smites but thrice: so apt we are to be wanting to ourselves; so coldly do we execute the commands of God. The sick prophet is not more grieved, than angry, at this dull negligence. Doubtless, God had revealed to him, for his last gratification, that, on his fervent prayers, so oft as Joash should voluntarily, after his general charge, smite the earth, so oft should Israel smite Syria.

Elisha's zeal doth not languish with his body. With a fatherly authority he chides him, who had styled him father; not fearing to spend some of his last wind, in a mild reproof; 'Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then thou hadst smitten Syria, till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.' Not that the unchangeable decree of the Almighty meant to suspend itself, on the uncertain issue of Joash's will; but he, that puts this word into the mouth of his prophet, puts this motion into the hand of the king, which did not more willingly stay, than necessarily obey the providence whereby it was stirred. Even while we have our freest choice, we fall on those actions and circumstances, whereby the just and holy will of our God is brought about. Our very neglects, our ignorances, shall fulfil his eternal councils.

Elisha dies, and is buried. His miracles do not cease with his life. Who can marvel, that his living prayers raised the son of the Shunamite, when his dead bones raise the carcass that touched them?

God will be free in his works. He, that must die himself, yet shall revive another. The same power might have continued life to him, that gave it by his bones.

Israel shall well see that he lives, by whose virtue Elisha was, both in life and death, miraculous. While the prophet was alive, the impetration might seem to be his, though the power were God's; now that he is dead, the bones can challenge nothing, but send the wandering Israelites to that almighty Agent, to whom it is all one to work by the quick or dead.

Were not the men of Israel more dead than the carcass

thus buried, how could they choose but see in this revived corpse, an emblem of their own condition? How could they choose but think, 'If we adhere to the God of Elisha, he shall raise our decayed estates, and restore our nation to the former glory?'

The Sadducees had as yet no being in Israel. With what face could that heresy ever after look into the world, when, before the birth of it, it was so palpably convinced, with an example of the resurrection?

Intermission of time and degrees of corruption add nothing to the impossibility of our rising. The body that is once cold in death hath no more aptitude to a reanimation, than that which is mouldered into dust. Only the divine power of the Maker must restore either, can restore both.

When we are dead, and buried in the grave of our sin, it is only the touch of God's prophets, applying unto us the death and resurrection of the Son of God, that can put new life into us. No less true, though spiritual, is the miracle of our raising up, from an estate of inward corruption, to a life of grace.

Yet all this prevails not with Israel. No bones of Elisha could raise them from their wicked idolatry; and, notwithstanding their gross sins, Joash their king prospers. Whether it were for the sake of Jehu, whose grandchild he was, or for the sake of Elisha, whose face he wept on, his hand is notably successful; not only against the son of Hazael king of Syria, whom he beats out of the cities of Israel; but against Amaziah king of Judah, whom he took prisoner, beating down the very walls of Jerusalem, and returning laden with the sacred and rich spoil, both of the temple and court, to his Samaria.

Oh the depth of the divine justice and wisdom, in these outward administrations! The best cause, the best man, doth not ever fare best. Amaziah did that, which was right in the sight of the Lord; Joash, evil: Amaziah follows David, though not with equal paces; Joash follows Jeroboam: yet is Amaziah shamefully foiled by Joash. Whether God yet meant to visit on this king of Judah, the still odious unthankfulness of his father to Jehoiada; or, to plague Judah for their share in the blood of Zecha-

riah, and their late revolt to idolatry; or, whether Amaziah's too much confidence in his own strength, which moved his bold challenge to Joash, were thought fit to be thus taken down; or whatever other secret ground of God's judgment there might be, it is not for our presumption to inquire. Whoso, by the event, shall judge of love or hatred, shall be sure to run on that wo, which belongs to them that call good evil, and evil good.

What a savage piece of justice it is, to put the right, whether of inheritance or honor, to the decision of the sword, when it is no news, for the better to miscarry by the hand of the worse!

The race is not to the swift; the battle is not to the strong; no, not to the good. Perhaps, God will correct his own by a foil; perhaps, he will plague his enemy by a victory. They are only our spiritual combats, wherein our faithful courage is sure of a crown.—2 Kings xiii.

UZZIAH LEPROUS.

Even the throne of David passed many changes of good and evil. Good Jehoshaphat was followed, with three successions of wicked princes; and those three were again succeeded, with three others godly and virtuous.

Amaziah, for a long time, shone fair; but, at the last, shut up in a cloud. The gods of the Edomites marred him. His rebellion against God stirred up his people's rebellion against him.

The same hands that slew him crowned his son Uzziah; so as the young king might imagine it was not their spite, that drew violence on his father, but his own wickedness.

Both early did this prince reign, and late. He began at sixteen; and sat fifty-two years in the throne of Judah. They, that mutinied in the declining age of Amaziah the father, are obsequious to the childhood of the son; as if they professed to adore sovereignty, while they hated lewdness. The unchanged government of good princes is the happiness, no less of the subjects than of themselves. The hand knows best to guide those reins, to which it hath been inured; and even mean hackneys

go on cheerfully, in their wonted road. Custom, as it makes evils more supportable, so, where it meets with constant minds, makes good things more pleasing and beneficial.

The wise and holy prophet Zechariah was a happy tutor, to the minority of king Uzziah. That vessel can hardly miscarry, where a skilful steersman sits at the helm. The first praise of a good prince is, to be judicious and just and pious, in himself; the next is, to give ear and way, to them that are such. While Zechariah hath the visions of God, and Uzziah takes the counsels of Zechariah, it is hard to say, whether the prophet, or the king, or the state, be happier.

God will be in no man's debt. So long as Uzziah 'sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.' Even what we do out of duty cannot want a reward. Godliness never disappointed any man's hopes; oft hath exceeded them. If Uzziah fight against the Philistines, if against the Arabians and Mehunims; according to his names (Uzziah, Azariah), the Strength, the Help, of the Almighty is with him. The Ammonites come in with presents; and all the neighbor nations ring of the greatness, of the happiness, of Uzziah. His bounty, and care, makes Jerusalem both strong and proud of her new towers; yea, the very desert must taste of his munificence.

The outward magnificence of princes cannot stand firm, unless it be built on the foundations of providence and frugality. Uzziah had not been so great a king, if he had not been so great a husband. He had his flocks in the deserts, and his herds in the plains; his ploughs in the fields; his vinedressers on the mountains, and in Carmel: neither was this more out of profit, than delight; 'for he loved husbandry.' Who can contemn those callings for meanness, which have been the pleasures of princes?

Hence was Uzziah so potent at home, so dreadful to his neighbors: his wars had better sinews than theirs. Which of his predecessors was able to maintain so settled an army, of more than of three hundred and ten thousand trained soldiers, well furnished, well fitted for the suddenest occasion? Thrift is the strongest prop of power.

The greatness of Uzziah, and the rare devices of his artificial engines for war, have not more raised his fame, than his heart. So is he swoln up, with the admiration of his own strength and glory, that he breaks again. How easy it is, for the best man to dote on himself; and to be lifted up so high, as to lose the sight, both of the ground whence he arises, and of the hand that advanced him! How hard it is, for him, that hath invented strange engines for the battering of his enemies, to find out any means to beat down his own proud thoughts!

Wise Solomon knew what he did, when he prayed to be delivered from too much: 'Lest,' said he, 'I be full, and deny thee; and say, Who is the Lord?' On this rock, did the son of Solomon run, and split himself: his full sails of prosperity carried him into presumption and ruin. What may he not do? What may he not be? Because he found his power otherwise unlimited; overruling in the court, the cities, the fields, the deserts, the arms, and magazines; therefore he thinks he may do so in the temple too: as things royal, civil, husbandly, military, passed his hands; so why should not, thinks he, sacred also? It is a dangerous indiscretion, for a man not to know the bounds of his own calling. What confusion doth not follow, on this breaking of the ranks!

On a solemn day, king Uzziah clothes himself in pontifical robes; and, in the view of that populous assembly, walks up in state into the temple of God, and, boldly approaching to the altar of incense, offers to burn sweet odors on it to the God of heaven. Azariah, the priest, is sensible of so perilous an encroachment: he, therefore, attended with fourscore valiant assistants of that holy tribe, hastens after the king; and, finding him with the censer in his hand, ready addressed to that sinful devotion, stays him with a free and grave expostulation: 'There is no place, wherein I could be sorry to see thee, O king, but this, where thou art; neither is there any act, that we should grudge thee so much, as this, which is the most sacred. Is it possible, that so great an oversight should fall into such wisdom? Can a religious prince, trained up under a holy Zechariah, after so many years' zealous profession of piety, be either ignorant or

regardless of these limits, which God hath set to his own services? Oh, what means this uncouth attempt? Consider, O dear sovereign, for God's sake, for thy soul's sake, consider where thou art, what thou doest. It is God's house, wherein thou standest; not thine own. Look about thee, and see, whether these vails, these tables, these pillars, these walls, these pavements, have any resemblance of earth. There is no place in all the world, whence thy God hath excluded thee, but only this: this, he hath reserved for his own use: and canst thou think much, to allow one room as proper to him, who hath not grudged all the rest to thee? But if it be thy zeal of a personal service to God, that hath carried thee hither; alas! how canst thou hope to please the Almighty, with a forbidden sacrifice? Which of thy holy progenitors ever dared to tread, where thy foot now standeth? Which of them ever put forth their hand, to touch this sacred altar? Thou knowest that God hath set apart and sanctified his own attendants. Wherefore serves the priesthood, if this be the right of kings? Were it not for the strict prohibition of our God, it could seem no other than an honor to our profession, that a king should think to dignify himself by our employment; but now, knowing the severe charge of the great King of heaven, we cannot but tremble to see that censer in thy hand. Who ever, out of the holy tribe, hath wielded it unrevenged? This affront is not to us; it is to the God, whom we serve. In awe of that terrible Majesty, as thou wouldest avoid some exemplary judgment, O king, withdraw thyself, not without humble deprecations, from this presence; and lay down that interdicted handfull, with fear and trembling. Be thou ever a king; let us be priests: the sceptre is thine; let censers be ours.'

What religious heart could do other, than relent at so faithful and just an admonition? But how hard is it, for great persons to yield they have offended! Uzziah must not be faulty. What is done rashly shall be borne out with power. He was wroth; and thus expresseth it: 'What means this saucy expostulation, O ye sons of Levi? How dare ye thus malapertly control the well-meant actions of your sovereign? If ye be priests, remember that ye are

subjects; or if ye will needs forget it, how easy is it for this hand to awake your memory! What such offence can it be, for me to come into that house, and to touch that altar, which my royal progenitors have made, beautified, consecrated? Is the God of this place only yours? Why do ye thus ambitiously engross religion? If princes have not intermeddled with these holy affairs, it was because they would not; not because they might not. When those laws were made for the sanctuary, there were no kings to grace these divine ceremonies; yet even then, Moses was privileged. The persons of princes, if ye know not, are no less sacred, than your own. It is your presumption, to account the Lord's anointed profane. Contest with those, whose dry and unhallowed heads are subject to your power: for me, I will not ask your leave to be devout. Look ye to your own censers: presume not to meddle with mine. In the mean time, can ye think this insolence of yours shall escape unrevenged? Can it stand with the honor of my sovereignty, to be thus proudly checked by subjects? God do so to me and more also, if—"

While Uzziah yet speaks, God strikes. Ere the words of fury can come forth of his mouth, the leprosy appears in his forehead. Leprosy was a most loathsome disease: the forehead is the most conspicuous part: had this shameful scurf broken forth on his hand, or foot, or breast, it might have been hid from the eyes of men: now the forehead is smitten with this judgment, that God may proclaim to all beholders, 'Thus shall it be done to the man, whose arrogance hath thrust him on a sacred charge.' Public offences must have open shame.

It is a dangerous thing, to put ourselves into the affairs, into the presence of God, unwarranted. There cannot be a more foolish misprision, than, because we are great on earth, to think we may be bold with Heaven. When God's messengers cannot prevail by counsels, entreaties, threats, it is time for God to show his immediate judgments. Wilful offenders can expect nothing but a fearful revenge.

Now begins Uzziah to be confounded in himself; and shame strives with leprosy, for a place in his forehead.

The hand of God hath done that in an instant, which all the tongues of men had attempted in vain. There needs no further solicitor of his egress: the sense of his plague sends him forth alone. And now he thinks, 'Wretched man that I am, how have I angered God; and undone myself! I would needs come in like a priest, and now go forth a leper. The pride of my heart made me think myself worthy the presence of a God: God's just displeasure hath now made me unworthy of the presence of men. While I affected the altar, I have lost my throne. While I scornfully rejected the advice and censures of God's ministers, I am now become a spectacle of horror and deformity to my own servants. I, that would be sending up perfumes to heaven, have made my nastiness hateful to my own senses. What do I under this sacred roof? Neither is God's house now, for me, nor mine own. What cell, what dungeon, is close enough for me, wherein to wear out the residue of mine unhappy and uncomfortable days? O God, thou art just, and I am miserable.'

Thus, with a dejected countenance, and sad heart, doth Uzziah haste to retire himself; and wishes, that he could be no less hid from himself, than from others. How easy is it for the God of heaven, to bring down the highest pitch of earthly greatness, and to humble the stubbornest pride!

On the leisure of second thoughts, Uzziah cannot but acknowledge much favor in this correction, and confess to have escaped well. Others, he knew, had been struck dead, or swallowed up quick, for so presumptuous an intrusion. It is happy for him, if his forehead may excuse his soul.

Uzziah ceased not to be a king, when he began to be a leper. The disease of his forehead did not remove his crown. His son Jotham reigned for him, under him; and while he was not seen, yet he was obeyed. The character of sovereignty is indelible; whether by bodily infirmity, or by spiritual censure. Neither is it otherwise, O God, betwixt thee and us: if we be once a royal generation unto thee, our leprosies may deform us, they shall not dethrone us. Still shall we have the right, still the posses-

sion, of that glorious kingdom, wherein we are invested from eternity.—2 Kings xiv. xv. 2 Chron. xxvi.

AHAZ WITH HIS NEW ALTAR.

After many unhappy changes of the two thrones, Ahaz succeeds Jotham in the kingdom of Judah: an ill son of a good father; not more the heir of David's seat, than of Jeroboam's sin.

Though Israel play the harlot, yet who can abide that Judah should sin? It is hard, not to be infected with a contagious neighborhood. Who ever read, that the kingdom of Israel was seasoned, with the vicinity of the true religion of Judah? Goodness (such as our nature is) is not so apt to spread. A tainted air doth more easily affect a sound body, than a wholesome air can clear the sick.

Superstition hath ever been more successful, than truth. The young years of Ahaz are soon misled, to a plausible misdevotion.

A man, that is once fallen from truth, knows not where he shall stay. From the calves of Jeroboam, is Ahaz drawn to the gods of the heathen; yea, now, bulls and goats are too little for those new deities: his own flesh and blood is but dear enough; 'He made his son to pass through their fire.'

Where do we find any religious Israelite, thus zealous for God? Neither doth the holiness, and mercy, of our God require so cruel a sacrifice: neither is our dull and niggardly hand ready to gratify him, with more easy obediences. O God, how gladly should we offer unto thee our souls and bodies, which we may enjoy so much the more, when they are thine; since zealous Pagans stick not to lose their own flesh and blood in an idol's fire!

He, that hath thus shamefully cast off the God of his fathers, cannot be long without a fearful revenge. The king of Israel galls him on the one side; the king of Syria, on the other. To avoid the shock of both, Ahaz doth not betake himself to the God whom he had offended, who was able to make his enemies at peace with him; but to

Tiglath Pileser king of Ashur. Him doth he woo with suits, with gifts; and robs God of those presents, which may endear so strong a helper. He, that thought not his son too dear for an idol, thinks not God's silver and gold too dear for an idolatrous abettor.

Oh the infinite patience of the Almighty! God gives success, awhile, to so offensive a rivalry. This Assyrian king prevails against the king of Syria; kills him; and takes his chief city, Damascus. The quarrel of the king of Judah hath enlarged the territories of his assistant, beyond hope. And now, while this Assyrian victor is enjoying the possession of his new-won Damascus, Ahaz goes up thither to meet him; to congratulate the victory; to add unto those triumphs, which were drawn on by his solicitation.

There he sees a new-fashioned altar, that pleases his eye. That old form of Solomon's, which was made by the pattern showed to Moses in the Mount, is now grown stale and despicable. A model of this more exquisite frame is sent to Urijah, the priest; and must be sampled in Jerusalem. It is a dangerous presumption, to make innovations, if but in the circumstances of God's worship. Those human additions, which would seem to grace the intitution of God, deprave it. That infinite wisdom knows best what will please itself, and prescribes accordingly. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Idolatry, and falsehood, is commonly more gaudy and plausible, than truth. That heart, which can for the outward homeliness despise the ordinances of God, is already aliened from true religion, and lies open to the grossest superstition.

Never any prince was so foully idolatrous, as that he wanted a priest to second him. A Urijah is fit to humor an Ahaz. Greatness could never command any thing, which some servile wits were not ready, both to applaud and justify.

Ere the king can be returned from Damascus, the altar is finished. It were happy, if true godliness could be so forward, in the prosecutions of good.

Neither is this strange pile reared only, but thrust up betwixt God's altar and the temple; in an apparent pre-

cedency; as if he had said; 'Let the God of Judah come behind the deities of Syria.'

And now, to make up the full measure of his impiety, this idolatrous king will himself be sacrificing on his new altar, to his new gods; the gods of Damascus. A usurped priesthood well becomes a false deity. 'Because,' saith he, 'the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.'

O blind superstition! How did the gods of Syria help their kings, when both those kings and their gods were vanquished and taken by the king of Assyria? Even this Damascus and this altar were the spoil of a foreign enemy. How then did the gods of Syria help their kings, any other than to their ruin? What dotage is this, to make choice of a foiled protection? But had the Syrians prospered, must their gods have the thanks? Are there no authors of good, but blocks or devils? or is an outward prosperity the only argument of truth, the only motive of devotion? O foolish Ahaz, it is the God thou hast forsaken that plagues thee, under whose only arm thou mightest have prevailed. His power beats those pagan stocks, one against another; so, as one while, one seems victorious, another vanquished; and at last he confounds both, together with their proudest clients. Thyself shall be the best instance.

Of all the kings of Judah hitherto, there is no one so dreadful an example, either of sin or judgment, as this son of good Jotham. I abhor to think, that such a monster should descend from the loins of David. Where should be the period of this wickedness? He began with the high places: thence he descends to the calves of Dan and Bethel: from thence he falls to a Syrian altar; to the Syrian god: then, from a partnership, he falls to an utter exclusion of the true God, and blocking up his temple: and then, to the sacrifice of his own son: and at last, as if hell were broken loose on God's inheritance, every several city, every high place of Judah, hath a new god. No marvel if he be branded by the Spirit of God, with 'This *is* that king Ahaz.'

What a fearful plague did this noisome deluge of sin leave behind it, in the land of Judah! Who can express

the horror of God's revenge, on a people that should have been his? Pekah, the king of Israel, slew a hundred and twenty thousand of them, in one day: amongst whom was Maaseiah, the son of Ahaz. O just judgment of the Almighty! Ahaz sheds the blood of one son, to an idol: the true God sheds the blood of another of his sons, in revenge.

Yet, the hand of the Lord is stretched out still. Two hundred thousand of them were carried away by the Israelites captive, to Samaria. The Edomites came, and carried away another part of them for bond slaves, to their country.

The Philistines came up, and shared the cities of the south of Judah, and the villages thereof. Shortly, what other is miserable Judah, than the prey and spoil of all the neighboring nations? 'For the Lord brought Judah low, because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.'

As for the great king of Ashur, whom Ahaz purchased with the sacrilegious pillage of the house of God, instead of an aid, he proves a burden. However he sped in his first onsets, now, 'he distressed Judah, but strengthened it not.' The charge was as great, as the benefit small: sooner shall he eat them out, than rescue them. No arm of flesh can shelter Ahaz from a vengeance.

'Be wise, O ye kings; be instructed, O ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.'

His subjects complain, that he died so late; and, as repenting that he ever was, deny him a room in the sepulchres of kings: as if they said; 'The common earth of Jerusalem is too good for him, that degenerated from his progenitors, marred his kingdom, depraved his people, forsook his God.'—2 Kings xvi. 2 Chron. xxviii.

THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

JUDAH was at a sore heave; yet Israel shall miscarry before it. Such are the sins of both, that they strive whether shall fall first; but this lot must light on the ten tribes.

Though the late king of Judah were personally worse than the most of Jeroboam's successors, yet the people were generally less evil; on whom the encroachments of idolatry were more by obtrusion, than by consent: besides that, the thrones of Judah had some interchanges of good princes; Israel, none at all. The same justice, therefore, that made Israel a scourge to Judah, made Assyria a scorpion to Israel.

It was the quarrel of Judah, that first engaged the king of Ashur in this war against Israel: now he is not so easily fetched off: so we have seen some eager mastiff, that hath been set on by the least clap of the hand, but could not be loosened by the force of staves.

Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, comes up against Hoshea, king of Israel; and subdues him, and puts him to his tribute. This yoke was uncouth and unpleasing. The vanquished prince was neither able to resist, nor willing to yield: secretly, therefore, he treats with the king of Egypt, for assistance; as desiring rather to hazard his liberty by the hand of an equal, than to enjoy a quiet subjection under the hand of an overruling power. We cannot blame princes, to be jealous of their sovereignties.

The detaining of his yearly tribute, and the whisperings with new confederates, have drawn up the king of Ashur to perfect his own victories. He returns therefore with a strong power; and, after three years' siege, takes Samaria, imprisons Hoshea; and, in the exchange of a woful captivity, he peoples Israel with Assyrians, and Assyria with Israelites.

Now, that abused soil hath, on a surfeit of wickedness, cast out her perfidious owners; and will try how it can fare with heathenish strangers. Now, the Assyrian gallants triumph in the palaces of Samaria and Jezreel; while the peers and captains of Israel are driven manacled through the Assyrian streets, and billeted to the several places of their perpetual servitude. Shortly, now, the florishing kingdom of the ten tribes is come to a final and shameful end; and so vanished in this last dissipation, that, since that day, no man could ever say, 'This was Israel.'

Oh terrible example of vengeance, on that peculiar

people, whom God hath chosen for himself, out of all the world! All the world were witnesses, of the favors of their miraculous deliverances and protections: all the world shall be witnesses, of their just confusion.

It is not in the power of slight errors, to set off that infinite mercy. What was it, O God, what was it, that caused thee to cast off thine own inheritance? What, but the same that made thee to cast the angels out of heaven? even their rebellious sins. Those sins dared to emulate the greatness of thy mercies, no less than they forced the severity of thy judgments: 'They left all the commandments of the Lord their God; and made them molten images, even two calves; and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven; and served Baal; and caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire; and used divination and enchantments; and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.'

Neither were these slips of frailty, or ignorant mistakings, but wilful crimes, obstinate impieties, in spite of the doctrines, reproofs, menaces, miraculous convictions, of the holy prophets, which God sent amongst them. Thy destruction is of thyself, O Israel. What could the just hand of the Almighty do less, than consume a nation so incorrigibly flagitious? a nation so unthankful for mercies, so impatient of remedies, so incapable of repentance; so obliged, so warned; so shamelessly, so lawlessly wicked?

What nation under heaven can now challenge an indefeasable interest in God, when Israel itself is cast off? What church in the world can show such dear love-tokens from the Almighty as this, now abhorred and adulterous spouse? He, that spared not the natural olive, shall he spare the wild? It is not for us, sinners of the Gentiles, to be high-minded, but awful.

The Israelites are carried captive into Assyria. Those goodly cities of the ten tribes may not lie waste and unpeopled. The wisdom of the victor finds it fit, to transplant his own colonies thither; that so he may raise profit thence, with security. From Babylon therefore, and Cuthah, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim, doth

he send of his own subjects, to possess and inhabit the cities of Samaria.

The land doth not brook her new tenants. 'They feared not the Lord' (how should they? they knew him not); 'therefore the Lord sent lions amongst them, which slew some of them.' Not the veriest Pagan can be excused, for his ignorance of God: even the depravedst nature might teach us, to tremble at a Deity. It is just with the Almighty, not to put up neglect, where he hath bestowed reason.

The brute creatures are sent, to revenge the quarrel of their Maker, on worse beasts than themselves. Still hath God left himself champions in Israel. Lions tear the Assyrians in pieces; and put them in mind, that, had it not been for wickedness, that land needed not to have changed masters. The great Lord of the world cannot want means to plague offenders. If the men be gone, yet the beasts are there; and if the beasts had been gone, yet so long as there were stones in the walls, in the quarries, God would be sure of avengers. There is no security, but in being at peace with God.

The king of Assyria is sued to, for remedy. Even these Pagans have learned to know, that these lions were sent from a God; that this punishment is for sin; 'They know not the manner of the God of the land; therefore he hath sent lions among them.' These blind heathen, that think every land hath a several god, yet, hold that God worthy of his own worship; yet, hold that worship must be grounded on knowledge; the want of that knowledge, punishable; the punishment of that want, just and divine. How much worse than Assyrians are they, that are ready to ascribe all calamities to nature, to chance! that, acknowledging but one God of all the world, are yet careless to know him, to serve him!

One of the priests of Israel is appointed to be carried back to Samaria, to teach the Assyrian colony the fashions of the God of the land; not for devotion, but for impunity. Vain politicians think to satisfy God, by patching up religions. Any forms are good enough, for an unknown deity. The Assyrian priests teach and practise the worship of their own gods; the Israelitish priest pre-

scribes the worship of the true God: the people will follow both; the one out of liking, the other out of fear.

What a prodigious mixture was here of religions; true with false, Jewish with Paganish, divine with devilish! Every division of these transplanted Assyrians had their several deities, high places, sacrifices. This high-priest of Israel intercommons with every of them: so that now these fathers of Samaritanism are in at all; 'They fear the Lord, and serve their idols.' No beggar's cloak is more pieced, than the religion of these new inhabitants of Israel. I know not how their bodies sped for the lions; I am sure their souls fared the worse for this medley. Above all things, God hates a mongrel devotion. If we be not all Israel, it were better to be all Ashur. It cannot so much displease God, to be unknown or neglected, as to be consorted with idols.—2 Kings xvii.

HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB.

ISRAEL is gone: Judah is left standing; or rather some few sprigs of those two tribes: so we have seen, in the shredding of some large timber-tree, one or two boughs left at the top to hold up the sap. Who can but lament the poor remainders, of that languishing kingdom of David?

Take out of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, one hundred and twenty thousand, whom Pekah, the king of Israel, slew in one day: take out two hundred thousand, that were carried away captive to Samaria: take out those, that were transported into the bondage of the Edomites; and those that were subdued in the south parts by the Philistines: alas, what a handful was left to the king of Judah, scarce the name of a dominion!

Yet, even now, out of the gleeds of Judah, doth God raise up a glorious light to his forlorn church; yea, from the wretched loins of Ahaz, doth God fetch a holy Hezekiah. It had been hard to conceive the state of Judah worse than it was: neither was it more miserable, than sinful; and, in regard of both, desperate; when, beyond hope, God revives this dying stock of David, and out of very ruins builds up his own house. Ahaz was not more the ill son of a good father, than he was the ill father of

a good son. He was the ill son of good Jotham, the ill father of good Hezekiah. Good Hezekiah makes amends, for his father's impiety; and puts a new life into the heartless remnant of God's people. The wisdom of our good God knows when his aid will be most seasonable, most welcome; which he then loves to give, when he finds us left of all our hopes. That merciful hand is reserved for a dead lift; then, he fails us not.

Now, you might have seen this pious prince busily bestirring himself, in so late and needful a reformation; removing the high places, battering and burning the idols, demolishing their temples, cutting down their groves, opening the temple, purging the altars and vessels, sanctifying the priests, rekindling the lamps, renewing the incense, reinstituting the sacrifices, establishing the order of God's service, appointing the courses, settling the maintenance of the ministers, publishing the decrees for the long-neglected passover, celebrating it and the other feasts with due solemnity, encouraging the people, contributing bountifully to the offerings, and, in one word, so ordering all the affairs of God as if he had been sent down from heaven to restore religion; as if David himself had been alive again in this blessed heir, not so much of his crown, as of his piety.

O Judah, happy in thy Hezekiah! O Hezekiah, happy in the gracious restoration of thy Judah!

Ahaz shall have no thank for such a son. The God, that is able of the very stones to raise children to Abraham, raises a true seed of David, out of the corrupt loins of an idolater. That infinite mercy is not tied to the terms of an immediate propagation.

For the space of three hundred years, the man after God's own heart had no perfect heir, till now. Till now, did the high places stand: the devotions of the best princes of Judah were blemished with some weak omissions: now, the zeal of good Hezekiah clears all those defects, and works an entire change.

How seasonably hath the providence of God kept the best man for the worst times! When God hath a great work to do, he knows to fit himself with instruments.

No marvel, if the Paganish idols go to wreck, when

even the brazen serpent, that Moses had made by God's own appointment, is broken in pieces. The Israelites were stung with fiery serpents: this brazen serpent healed them; which they did no sooner see, than they recovered. But now, such was the venom of the Israelitish idolatry, that this serpent of brass stung worse than the fiery: that, which first cured by the eye, now by the eye poisoned the soul; that, which was at first the type of a Saviour, is now the deadly engine of the enemy. While it helped, it stood; it stood, while it hurt not; but when once wicked abuse hath turned it into an idol, what was it but Nehushtan?

The holiness of the first institution cannot privilege aught from the danger of a future profanation; nor, as the case may stand, from an utter abolition. What antiquity, what authority, what primary service, might this serpent have pleaded? All that cannot keep it out of the dust. Those things, which are necessary in their being, beneficial in their continuance, may still remain, when their abuse is purged; but those things, whose use is but temporary, and whose duration is needless and unprofitable, may cease with the occasion, and much more perish with an inseparable abuse. Hezekiah willingly forgets who made the serpent, when he sees the Israelites make it an idol. It is no less intolerable for God, to have a rival of his own making.

Since Hezekiah was thus, above all his ancestors, upright with the Lord, it is no marvel, if the Lord were with him; if he prospered, whithersoever he went. The same God, that would have his justice magnified, in the confusion of the wicked princes of Israel and Judah, would have his mercy no less acknowledged, in the blessings of faithful Hezekiah.

The great king of Assyria had in a sort swallowed up both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel; yet not with an equal cruelty. He made Israel captive; Judah, on a willing composition, tributary. Israel is vanished in a transportation; Judah continues under the homage, wherein Ahaz left it. Hezekiah had reigned but six years, when he saw his neighbors of Israel packing into a miserable captivity, and the proud Assyrians lording in their

cities; yet, even then, when he stood alone in a corner of Judah, durst Hezekiah draw his neck out of the yoke of the great and victorious monarch of Assyria; and, as if one enemy had not been enough, at the same time he falls on the encroaching Philistines, and prevails. It is not to be asked, what powers a man can make, but in what terms he stands with Heaven.

The unworthy father of Hezekiah had clogged Judah, with this servile fealty to the Assyrian. What the conditions of that subjection were, it is too late, and needless for us to inquire. If this payment were limited to a period of time, the expiration acquitted him; if on covenants of aid, the cessation thereof acquitted him: if the reforming of religion and banishment of idolatry ran under the censure of rebellion, the quarrel on Hezekiah's part was holy; on Sennacherib's, unjust: but if the restipulation were absolute, and the withdrawing of this homage on none but civil grounds, I cannot excuse the good king from a just offence. It was a human frailty in an obliged prince, by force to effect a free and independent sovereignty.

What, do we mince that fact, which holy Hezekiah himself censures? 'I have offended; return from me: what thou puttest on me will I bear.' The comfort of liberty may not be had, with an unwarranted violence. Holiness cannot free us from infirmity. It was a weakness, to do that act, which must be soon undone, with much repentance and more loss. This revolt shall cost Hezekiah, besides much humiliation, three hundred yearly talents of silver, thirty talents of gold. How much better had it been for the cities of Judah, to have purchased their peace with an easy tribute, than war with intolerable taxation!

Fourteen years, had good Hezekiah fed on a sweet peace, sauced only with a set pension; now he must prepare his palate, for the bitter morsels of war. The king of Assyria is come up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and hath taken them. Hezekiah is fain to buy him out, with too many talents. The poor kingdom of Judah is exhaust, with so deep a payment; insomuch, as the king is forced to borrow of God himself; for

'Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord;' yea, 'at that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which he had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.'

How hard was good Hezekiah driven, ere he would be thus bold with his God! Surely, if the mines or coffers of Judah could have yielded any supply, this shift had been hateful; to fetch back for an enemy, that which he had given to his Maker. Only necessity excuses that from sacrilege in the son, which will made sacrilege in the father. That, which is once devoted to a sacred use, may not be called back to a profane: but he, whose the earth is and the fulness of it, is not so taken with our metals, that he should more regard our gold, than our welfare. His goodness cannot grudge any outward thing, for the price of our peace. To rob God out of covetousness, or wantonness, or neglect, is justly damnable: we cannot rob him out of our need; for then he gives us all we take; and bids us ransom our lives, our liberties. The treasures of God's house were precious, for his sake, to whom they were consecrated; but more precious in the sight of the Lord was the life of any one of his saints.

Every true Israelite was the spiritual house of God. Why should not the door of the material temple be willingly stripped, to save the whole frame of the spiritual temple? Take therefore, O Hezekiah, what thou hast given: no gold is too holy to redeem thy vexation: it matters not so much, how bare the doors of the temple be, in a case of necessity, as how well the insides be furnished, with sincere devotion. Oh the cruel hard-heartedness of those men, which will rather suffer the living temples of God to be ruined, than they will ransom their life with farthings!

It could not be, but that the store of needy Judah must soon be drawn dry, with so deep an exaction. That sum cannot be sent, because it cannot be raised: the cruel tyrant calls for his bricks, while he allows no straw. His anger is kindled, because Hezekiah's coffers have a bottom: with a mighty host doth he come up against Je-

rusalem: therefore shall that city be destroyed by him, because by him it hath been impoverished: the inhabitants must be slaves, because they are beggars.

Oh lamentable, and, in sight, desperate condition of distressed Jerusalem! Wealth it had none: strength it had; but a little: all the country round about was subdued to the Assyrian: that proud victor hath begirt the walls of it, with an innumerable army; scorning that such a shovel-full of earth should stand out but one day: poor Jerusalem stands alone, blocked up with a world of enemies, helpless, friendless, comfortless, looking for the worst of a hostile fury; when Tartan, and Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh, the great captains of the Assyrians, call to a parley. Hezekiah sends to them three of his prime officers, his steward, his secretary, his recorder.

Lord, what insolent blasphemies doth that foul mouth of Rabshakeh belch out against the living God, against his anointed servant! How plausibly doth he discourage the subjects of Hezekiah! How proudly doth he insult on their impotency! How doth he brave them, with base offers of advantage! And lastly, how cunningly doth he forelay their confidence, which was only left them, in the Almighty; protesting not to be come up thither without the Lord; 'The Lord said to me, Go up to this land, and destroy it.'

How fearful a word was this! The rest were but vain cracks: this was a thunderbolt, to strike dead the heart of Hezekiah. If Rabshakeh could have been believed, Jerusalem could not but have flown open. How could it think to stand out, no less against God, than men? Even thus doth the great enemy of mankind: if he can dishearten the soul from a dependance on the God of mercies, the day is his. Lewd miscreants care not how they belie God, for their own purposes.

Eliakim, the steward of Hezekiah, well knew, how much the people must needs be affected with this pernicious suggestion; and fain would therefore, if not stop that wicked mouth, yet divert these blasphemies into a foreign expression. I wonder that any wise man should look for favor from an enemy: 'Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language.' What was this,

but to teach an adversary, how to do mischief? Wherefore came Rabshakeh thither, but to gall Hezekiah, to withdraw his subjects? That tongue is properest for him, which may hurt most. Deprecations of evil to a malicious man are no better than advices. An unknown idiom is fit to keep counsel: they are familiar words, that must convey aught to the understanding.

Lewd men are the worse for admonitions. Rabshakeh had not so strained his throat to corrupt the citizens of Jerusalem, had it not been for the humble obtestation of Eliakim. Now he rears up his voice, and holds his sides, and roars out his double blasphemies: one while, affrighting the people, with the great power of the mighty king of Assyria; another while, debasing the contemptible force of Hezekiah: now, smoothly alluring them, with the assurances of a safe and successful yieldance; then, discouraging them, with the impossibility of their deliverance; laying before them the fearful examples of greater nations vanquished, by that sword, which was now shaken over them; triumphing in the impotency and miscarriage of their gods: 'Who are they, among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? Where are the gods of Arpad, and of Hamath?' Where? but in that hellish darkness, that is ordained both for them and for thee, barbarous Assyrian, that darest thus open thy mouth against thy Maker. And can those atheistic eyes of thine see no difference of gods? Is there no distance, betwixt a stock or stone and that infinite Deity, that made heaven and earth? It is enough, that thou now feelest it. Thy torments have taught thee too late, that thou affrontedst a living God.

How did the fingers and tongues of those Jewish peers and people itch to be at Rabshakeh, in a revengeful answer to those impieties! All is hushed. Not a word sounds from those walls. I do not more wonder, at Hezekiah's wisdom in commanding silence, than at the subjects' obedience in keeping it. This railer could not be more spited, than with no answer; and, if he might be exasperated, he could not be reformed. Besides, the

rebounding of those multiplied blasphemies might leave some ill impressions in the multitude. This sulphurous flask, therefore, dies in his own smoke; only leaving a hateful stench behind it.

Good Hezekiah cannot easily pass over this devilish oratory. No sooner doth he hear of it, than he rends his clothes, and covers himself with sackcloth, and betakes himself to the house of the Lord; and sends his officers and the gravest of the priests, clad in sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet of God, with a doleful and querulous message.

Oh the noble piety of Hezekiah! Notwithstanding all the straits of the siege and the danger of so powerful an enemy, I find not the garments of this good king, any otherwise than whole and unchanged; but now, so soon as ever a blasphemy is uttered against the majesty of his God, though by a Pagan dog, his clothes are torn and turned into sackcloth. There can be no better argument of an upright heart, than to be more sensible of the indignities offered to God, than of our own dangers. Even these desperate reproaches send Hezekiah to the temple. The more we see God's name profaned, the more shall we, if we be truly religious, love and honor it.

Whither should Hezekiah run, but to the temple, to the prophet? There, there is the refuge of all faithful ones; where they may speak with God, where they may be spoken to from God, and fetch comfort from both.

It is not possible, that a believing heart should be disappointed. Isaiah sends that message to the good king, that may dry up his tears, and cheer his countenance, and change his suit; 'Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Syria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'

Lo, even while Sennacherib was in the height of his jollity and assurance, God's prophet foresees his ruin; and gives him for dead, while that tyrant thought of nothing but life and victory. Proud and secure worldlings little dream of the near approach of their judgments;

while they are plotting their deepest designs, the overruling justice of the Almighty hath contrived their sudden confusion, and sees and sets them their day.

Rabshakeh returns; and, finding the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, reports to him the silent, and therein contemptuous answer and firm resolutions of Hezekiah. In the mean time, God pulls Sennacherib by the ear, with the news of the approaching army of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia; which was coming up to raise the siege; and to succor his confederates. That dreadful power will not allow the Assyrian king, in person to lead his other forces up against Jerusalem, nor to continue his former leaguer long before those walls: but now, he writes big words to Hezekiah; and thinks, with his thundering menaces, to beat open the gates, and level the bulwarks of Jerusalem. Like the true master of Rabshakeh, he reviles the God of heaven; and basely parallels him, with the dunghill deities of the heathen.

Good Hezekiah gets him into his sanctuary. There he spreads the letter before the Lord; and calls to the God, that dwells between the cherubims, to revenge the blasphemies of Sennacherib, to protect and rescue himself and his people.

Every one of those words pierced heaven; which was no less open to mercy unto Hezekiah, than vengeance to Sennacherib. Now is Isaiah addressed, with a second message of comfort to him, who doubtless distrusted not the first; only the reiteration of that furious blasphemy made him take faster hold, by his faithful devotion. Now, the jealous God, in a disdain of so blasphemous a contestation, rises up in a style of majesty, and gloriously tramples on this saucy insolency; 'Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook into thy nose, and my bridle into thy lips: and will turn thee back by the way thou camest.' Lo, Sennacherib, the God of heaven makes a beast of thee, who hast so brutishly spurned at his name. If thou be a ravenous bear, he hath a hook for thy nostrils; if thou be a resty horse, he hath a bridle for thy mouth: in spite of thee, thou shalt follow his hook, or his bridle; and shalt be led to thy just shame by either.

It is not for us, to be the lords of our own actions: 'Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, shall he return,' &c. Impotent men, what are we in the hands of the Almighty! We purpose; he overrules: we talk of great matters, and think to do wonders; he blows on our projects, and they vanish with ourselves. He, that hath set bounds to the sea, hath appointed limits to the rage of the proudest enemies; yea, even the devils themselves are confined. 'Why boast ye yourselves, O ye tyrants, that ye can do mischief?' Ye are stinted; and even within those lists is confusion.

Oh the trophies of divine justice! 'That very night, the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.'

How speedy an execution was this! how miraculous! No human arm shall have the glory of this victory. It was God, that was defied by that presumptuous Assyrian; it is God, that shall right his own wrongs. Had the Egyptian or Ethiopian forces been come up, though the same God had done this work by them, yet some praise of this slaughter had perhaps cleaved to their fingers: now, an invisible hand sheds all this blood; that his very enemies may clear him, from all partnership of revenge.

Go now, wicked Sennacherib, and tell of the gods of Hamath, and Arpad, and Sepharvaim, and Hena, and Ivah, which thou hast destroyed; and say, that Hezekiah's God is but as one of these. Go, and add this deity, to the number of thy conquests. Now say, that Hezekiah's God, in whom he trusted, hath deceived him, and graced thy triumphs.

With shame and grief enough, is that sheeped tyrant returned to his Nineveh; having left behind him all the pride and strength of Assyria, for compost to the Jewish fields.

Well were it for thee, O Sennacherib, if thou couldest

escape thus. Vengeance waits for thee at home, and welcomes thee into thy place. While thou art worshipping in the house of Nisroch thy god, two of thine own sons shall be thine executioners. See now if that false deity of thine can preserve thee from that stroke, which the true God sends thee, by the hand of thine own flesh. He, that slew thy host by his angels, slays thee by thy sons. The same angel, that killed all those thousands, could as easily have smitten thee; but he rather reserves thee, for the further torment of an unnatural stroke, that thou mayest see too late, how easy it is for him, in spite of thy god, to arm thine own loins against thee.

Thou art avenged, O God, thou art avenged plentifully of thine enemies. Whosoever strives with thee is sure to gain nothing but loss, but shame, but death, but hell. The Assyrians are slain; Sennacherib is rewarded for his blasphemy; Jerusalem is rescued; Hezekiah rejoices; the nations wonder and tremble. 'Oh love the Lord, all ye saints, for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plenteously rewardeth the proud doer.'—2 Kings xviii. xix. 2 Chron. xxix. Isa. xxxvi. xxxvii.

HEZEKIAH SICK, RECOVERED, VISITED.

Hezekiah was freed from the siege of the Assyrians, but he is surprised with a disease. He, that delivered him from the hand of his enemies, smites him with sickness. God doth not let us loose from all afflictions, when he redeems us from one.

To think that Hezekiah was either not thankful enough for his deliverance, or too much lifted up with glory of so miraculous a favor, were an injurious misconstruction of the hand of God, and an uncharitable censure of a holy prince; for, though no flesh and blood can avoid the just desert of bodily punishment, yet God doth not always strike with an intuition of sin: sometimes he regards the benefit of our trial; sometimes, the glory of his mercy in our cure.

It was no slight distemper, that seized on Hezekiah; but a disease, both painful and fierce, and in nature deadly. O God, how thou lashest even those, whom thou lovest! Hadst thou ever any such darling in the throne

of Judah, as Hezekiah? Yet, he no sooner breaketh from a miserable siege, than he panteth under a mortal sickness.

When, as yet, he had not so much as the comfort of a child to succeed him, thy prophet is sent to him, with the heavy message of his death; 'Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.' It is no small mercy of God, that he gives us warning of our end. We shall make an ill use of so gracious a premonition, if we make not a meet preparation for our passage. Even those, that have not a house, yet have a soul. No soul can want important affairs, to be ordered for a final dissolution. The neglect of this best thrift is desperate. Set thy soul in order, O man; for thou shalt die, and not live.

If God had given Hezekiah a son, nature had bequeathed his estate; now, he must study to find heirs. Even these outward things, though in themselves worthless, require our careful disposition, to those we leave behind us; and if we have delayed these thoughts till then, our sickbeds may not complain of their importunity. We cannot leave to our families a better legacy than peace.

Never was the prophet Isaiah unwelcome to this good king, until now. Even sad tidings must be carried by those messengers, which would be faithful; neither may we regard so much, how they will be taken, as by whom they are sent.

It was a bold and harsh word to say to a king, 'Thou shalt die, and not live.' I do not hear Hezekiah rage and fret at the message, or threat the bearer; but he meekly turns his face to the wall, and weeps, and prays.

Why to the wall? Was it for the greater secrecy of his devotion? Was it for the more freedom from all distraction? Was it that the passion, which accompanied his prayer, might have no witnesses? Or, was it for that this wall looked towards the temple, which his heart and eyes still moved unto, though his feet could not?

However, the patient zeal of good Hezekiah turns itself to that holy God, from whom he smarts and bleeds, and pours out itself into a fervent deprecation: 'I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.'

Couldst thou fear, O Hezekiah, that God had forgotten

thine integrity? The grace, that was in thee, was his own work: could he in thee neglect himself? Or dost thou therefore doubt of his remembrance of thy faithfulness, because he summons thee to receive the crown of thy faithfulness, glory and immortality? Wherein canst thou be remembered, if this be to forget thee? What challenge is this? Is God a debtor to thy perfection? Hath thy holy carriage merited any thing from that infinite justice? Far, far were these presumptuous conceits from that humble and mortified soul. Thou hadst hated thine own breast, if it could once have harbored so proud a thought. This perfection of thine was no other, than an honest soundness of heart and life, which thou knewest God had promised to reward. It was the mercy of the covenant that thou pleadedst; not the merit of thine obedience.

Every one of these words was steeped in tears: but what meant these words, these tears? I hear not of any suit moved by Hezekiah; only he wishes to be remembered, in that which could never be forgotten, though he should have entreated for an oblivion.

Speak out, Hezekiah. What is it, that thy tears crave, while thy lips express not? 'O let me live, and I shall praise thee, O God.'

In a natural man, none could wonder at this passionate request: who cannot but wonder at it, in a saint; whose happiness doth but then begin, when his life ceaseth; whose misery doth but then end, when his death enters? The word of faith is, 'Oh let me die, that I may enjoy thee.' How then doth the king cry at the news of that death, which some resolute Pagans have entertained with smiles? Certainly, the best man cannot strip himself of some flesh; and, while nature hath an undeniable share in him, he cannot but retain some smatch of the sweetness of life, of the horror of dissolution. Both these were in Hezekiah; neither of them could transport him into this passion: they were higher respects that swayed with so holy a prince; a tender care of the glory of God, a careful pity of the church of God. His very tears said, 'O God, thou knowest that the eyes of the world are bent on me, as one that hath abandoned their idolatry, and restored thy sincere worship. I stand alone, in the midst of a wicked

and idolatrous generation, that looks through all my actions, all my events: if now they shall see me snatched away in the midst of my days, what will these heathen say? How can thy great name but suffer, in this my untimely extinction? Besides, what will become of thy poor church, which I shall leave feebly religious, and as yet scarce warm, in the course of a pious reformation? How soon shall it be miserably overgrown, with superstition and heathenism! How soon shall the wild boar of Assyria root up this little vineyard of thine! What need I beseech thee, O Lord, to regard thy name, to regard thine inheritance?'

What one tear of Hezekiah can run waste? What can that good king pray for, unheard, unanswered? Sennacherib came, in a proud confidence to swallow up his city and people; prayers and tears send him away confounded: Death comes to swallow up his person, and that not without authority; prayers and tears send him away disappointed. Before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord; and I will add to thy days fifteen years.'

What shall we say then, O God? Hast thou thus soon changed thy purpose? Was it not thy true message, which thy prophet, even now, delivered to Hezekiah? Is somewhat fallen out, that thou foresawest not? Or dost thou now decree somewhat thou meanest not? The very thought of any of these were no better than blasphemous impiety. Certainly, Hezekiah could not live one day longer than was eternally decreed. The decree of God's eternal counsel had from everlasting determined him fifteen years yet longer: why then doth God say, by his prophet, 'Thou shalt die, and not live?' He is not as man, that he should repent. The message is changed, the will is not changed: yea rather the message is explicated, not changed; for the signified will of God, though it sound absolutely, yet must be understood with condition: that tells Hezekiah what he must expect, from

the nature of his disease; what would befall him, without his deprecations. There was nothing but death in the second causes, whatever secret purpose there was in the first; and that purpose shall lie hid for a time, under a reserved condition. The same decree, that says, 'Nineveh shall be destroyed,' means, If Nineveh repent, it shall not be destroyed. He, that finds good reason to say, 'Hezekiah shall die,' yet still means, If the quickened devotion of Hezekiah shall importune me for life, it shall be protracted. And the same God, that hath decreed this addition of fifteen years, had decreed to stir up the spirit of Hezekiah, to that vehement and weeping importunity, which should obtain it. O God, thou workest thy good pleasure in us, and with us; and, by thy revealed will, movest us in those ways whereby thou effectest thy secret will.

How wonderful is this mercy! Hezekiah's tears are not dry on his cheeks, yea his breath is not passed his lips, when God sends him a comfortable answer. How careful is the God of compassions, that his holy servant should not languish one hour, in the expectation of his denounced death! What speed was here, as in the errand, so in the act of recovery! Within three days shall Hezekiah be on his feet; yea his feet shall stand in the courts of God's house. He, that now in his bed sighs and groans and weeps out a petition, shall then sing out a thanksgiving in the temple. 'O thou, that hearest the prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' With what cheerful assurance should we approach to the throne of that grace, which never failed any suppliant!

Neither was this grant more speedy, than bountiful. We are wont to reckon seven years for the life of a man; and now, behold, more than two lives hath God added to the age of Hezekiah.

How unexampled a favor is this! Who ever, but Hezekiah, knew his period so long before? The fixedness of his term is no less mercy, than the protraction. We must be content to live or die, at uncertainties. We are not worthy to calculate the date of our own times: 'Teach us, O Lord, so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.'

There is little joy in many days, if they be evil. Hezekiah shall not be blessed only with life, but with peace. The proud Assyrian threatens an invasion. His late foil still sticks in his stomach, and stirs him to a revenge. The hook is in his nostrils: he cannot move whither he list. The God of heaven will maintain his own quarrel; 'I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'

Lo; for his life Hezekiah is beholden, next under the infinite goodness of God, to his prayers; for his protection, to the dear memory of his father David. Surely, for aught we find, Hezekiah was no less upright and less offensive, than David; yet, both Hezekiah and Jerusalem shall fare the better for David's sake, above three hundred years after. To that man of his own heart, had God engaged himself, by his gracious promise, to preserve his throne, his seed. God loves to remember his ancient mercies. How happy a thing is it, to be faithful with God! This is the way to oblige those, which are yet unborn; and to entail blessings on the successions of future generations.

It seems, it was some pestilent ulcer, that thus endangered the life of Hezekiah. Isaiah is not a prophet only, but a physician. 'And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs.' He, that gave an assurance of recovery, gives a receipt for the recovery.

The decree of God includes the means. Neither can the medicine work, without a word; neither will the word work, without the medicine: both of them must meet in the cure. If we so trust the promise, that we neglect the prescript, we presume to no purpose. Happy is that soul, that so regards the promise of God's prophets, as that withal he receives their counsels.

Nothing could be more proper, for the ripening of hard and purulent tumors, than dry figs. Herein, Isaiah's direction was according to nature. Wherefore should we balk the ordinary road, where it is both fair and near?

The sudden contradiction of the message causes a just difficulty in the assent. Hezekiah therefore craves a sign; not for that he distrusted, but that he might trust the more. We can never take too fast hold of those pro-

mises of God, which have not more comfort in the application, than natural impossibility in the performance. We believe, Lord, help our unbelief.

The sick king hath his option. His father was offered a sign, and refused it; he sues for one, and obtains it. 'Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or back ten degrees?' as if heaven itself lay open to his choice; and were ready, either to mend his pace or retire, for his confirmation. What creature is not cheerfully forward to obey the faith of God's servants?

Hezekiah fastens rather on that sign, which is more hard, more disagreeing from the course of nature; not without good reason. Every proof must be clearer, than the thing to be proved; neither may there want a meet proportion betwixt both: now the going forward of the shadow was a motion, no other than natural; the recovery of that pestilent disease was against the stream of nature; the more difficult sign therefore, the surer evidence.

Whether shall we more wonder, at the measure of the love of God to Hezekiah, or at the power of Isaiah's faith in God? Out of both, either the sun goes back in heaven, that his shadow may go back on earth; or the shadow no less miraculously goes back on earth, while the sun goes forward in heaven. It is true, that the prophet speaks of the shadow, not of the sun; except perhaps because the motion of the sun is best discerned by the shadow, and the motion of the shadow is led by the course of the sun: besides that, the demonstration of this miracle is reported to be local in the dial of Ahaz, not universal in the sensible length of the day: withal, the retreat of the sun had made a public and noted change in the frame of nature; this particular alteration of the shadow, in places limited, might satisfy no less, without a confusive mutation in the face of the world. Whethersoever; to draw the sun back together with the shadow, or to draw the shadow back without the sun, was the proof of a divine omnipotence; able therefore to draw back the life of Hezekiah fifteen degrees from the night of death, towards which it was hasting. O God, thou wilt rather alter the course of heaven and

earth, than the faith of thy children shall sink for want of supportation.

It should seem the Babylonians, finding the Assyrians' power abated by the revengeful hand of God's angel and their own discord, took this advantage of a revolt; and now, to strengthen their part, fall in with Hezekiah king of Judah, whom they found the old enemy to the Assyrians, and the great favorite of Heaven. Him they woo with gifts; him they congratulate with ambassages. The fame of Hezekiah's sickness, recovery, form and assurance of cure, has drawn thither messengers and presents from Merodach Baladan, king of Babylon.

The Chaldees were curious searchers into the secrets of nature; especially into the motions of the celestial bodies. Though there had been no politic relations, this very astronomical miracle had been enough to fetch them to Jerusalem; that they might see the man, for whose sake the sun forsook his place, or the shadow forsook the sun.

How easily have we seen those holy men miscarried by prosperity, against whom no miseries could prevail? He, that stood out stoutly against all the Assyrian onsets, clinging the faster to his God, by how much he was harder assaulted by Sennacherib, melteth now with these Babylonian favors, and runs abroad into offensive weaknesses.

The Babylonian ambassadors are too welcome to Hezekiah. As a man transported with the honor of their respective and costly visitations, he forgets his tears, and his turning to the wall; he forgets their incompatible idolatry; so hugging them in his bosom, as if there had been no cause of strangeness. All his doors fly open to them; and, in a vainglorious ostentation, all his new-gathered treasures, all his strong armories, entertain their eyes: nothing in his house, nothing in his dominion, is hid from them.

O Hezekiah, what means this impotent ambition? It is not long since thou tearedst off the very plates of the temple-doors, to give unto Sennacherib; and can thy treasures be suddenly so multiplied, that they can be worthy to astonish foreign beholders? or, if thy storehouse were as rich as the earth, can thy heart be so vain, as to be lifted up with these heavy metals? Didst thou not see that

heaven itself was at thy beck, whilst thou wert humbled? and shall a little earthly dross have power over thy soul? Can the flattering applause of strangers let thee loose into a proud joy, whom the late message of God's prophet resolved into tears? O God, if thou do not keep us, as well in our sunshine, as in our storm, we are sure to perish. As 'in all time of our tribulation,' so 'in all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us.'

Alas, how slight doth this weakness seem in our eyes, to rejoice in the abundance of God's blessings! to call in foreign friends, to be witnesses of our plenty! to raise our conceits, some little, on the acclamations of others, on the value of our own abilities!

Lay thy hand on thy mouth, O foolish flesh and blood, when thou seest the censure of thy Maker.

Isaiah, the prophet, is sent speedily to Hezekiah, with a sharp and heart-breaking message; 'Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'

No sin can be light in Hezekiah. The holiness of the person adds to the unholiness of the act. Eminency of profession doubles both the offence and the judgment. This glory shall end in an ignominious loss. The great and holy God will not digest pride in any, much less in his own.

That, which was the subject of Hezekiah's sin, shall be the matter of his punishment: those, with whom he sinned, shall be his avengers. It was his treasure and munition, wherein he prides himself to these men of Babylon; the men of Babylon shall carry away his treasure and munition. What now doth Hezekiah, but tempt them with a glorious booty; as some fond traveller, that would show his gold to a thief?

These worldly things are farthest off from the heart. Perhaps Hezekiah might not be much troubled with their loss. Lo, God comes closer to him yet.

As yet, was Hezekiah childless. How much better had it been to continue so still, than to be plagued in his

issue! He shall now beget children to servitude: his loins shall yield pages to the court of Babylon: while he sees them born princes, he shall foresee them made eunuchs in a foreign palace. What comfort can he take, in the wishes and hopes of sons, when, ere they be born, he hears them destined to captivity and bondage?

This rod was smart, yet good Hezekiah kisses it. His heart struck him no less, than the mouth of the prophet; meekly therefore doth he yield to this divine correction; "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.' Thou hast spoken this word; but from the Lord. It is not thine, but his; and being his, it must needs be, like himself, good: good, because it is just, for I have deserved more and worse; good, because merciful, for I suffer not according to my deserts. 'Is it not good, if there be peace and truth in my days?' I have deserved a present payment; O God, thou deferrest it: I have deserved it in person; thou reservest it for those, whom I cannot yet so feel, because they are not: I have deserved to be overrun with superstition and idolatry; thou blessest me with truth; shouldst thou continue truth unto me, though on the most unquiet terms, the blessing were too good for me; but now thou hast promised, and wilt not reverse it, that both truth and peace shall be in my days: Lord, I adore thy justice, I bless thy mercy.'

God's children are neither waspish nor sullen, when they are chid or beaten; but patiently hold their backs to the stripes of a displeased mercy; knowing how much more God is to be magnified, for what he might have done, than repined at, for what he hath done; resigning themselves over into the hand of that gracious justice, which in their smart seeks their reformation and glory.—2 Kings xx. 2 Chron. xxxii. Isa. xxxviii.

MANASSEH.

At last, some three years after his recovery, Hezekiah hath a son; but such a one, as, if he could have foreseen, orbity had been a blessing.

Still, in the throne of Judah, there is a succession and interchange of good and evil. Good Jotham is succeeded by wicked Ahaz; wicked Ahaz is succeeded by good

Hezekiah; good Hezekiah is succeeded by wicked Manasseh. Evil princes succeed to good, for the exercise of the church; and good succeed to evil, for the comfort of the church.

The young years of Manasseh give advantage to his miscarriage: even while he might have been under the ferule, he swayed the sceptre. Whither may not a child be drawn; especially to a garish and puppet-like superstition? As infancy is capable of all impressions, so most of the worst.

Neither did Manasseh begin more early, than he held out long. He reigned more years, than his good father lived, notwithstanding the miraculous addition to his age; more than ever any king of Judah, besides, could reach. Length of days is no true rule of God's favor. As plants last longer than sensitive creatures, and brute creatures outlive the reasonable; so, amongst the reasonable, it is no news for the wickedly great to inherit these earthly glories longer than the best.

There wants not apparent reason for this difference. Good princes are fetched away to a better crown; they cannot be losers, that exchange a weak and fading honor, for a perfection and eternity of blessedness: wicked men live long to their own disadvantage; they do but carry so many more brands to their hell. If, therefore, there be a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there be a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness, far be it from us, either to pity the removal of the just, or to envy the continuance of the wicked: this continues to his loss; that departs to a happy advancement.

It is very like, that Hezekiah, marrying so late, in the vigor both of his age and holiness, made a careful choice of a wife suitable to his own piety. Neither had his delight been so much in her (according to her name), if her delight had not been, as his, in God. Their issue swerves from both; so fully inheriting the vices of his grandfather Ahaz, as if there had been no intervention of a Hezekiah. So, we have seen the kernel of a well-fruited plant degenerate into that crab or willow, which gave the original to his stock. Yet can I not say, that Hezekiah was as free from traducing evil to his son Manasseh, as Ahaz was free from traducing good to his son Hezekiah.

Evil is incorporated in the best nature, whereas even the least good descends from above.

We may not measure grace by means. Was it possible, that Manasseh, having been trained up in the religious court of his father Hezekiah, under the eye of so holy prophets and priests, under the shadow of the temple of God, after a childhood seasoned with so gracious precepts, with so frequent exercise of devotion, should run thus wild into all heathenish abominations; as if there had been nothing but idolatry in the seed of his conception, in the milk of his nourishment, in the rules of his institution, in the practice of his examples? How vain are all outward helps, without the influence of God's Spirit! and that Spirit breathes where he listeth. Good education raiseth great hopes, but the proof of them is in the divine benediction.

I fear to look at the outrages of this wicked son of Hezekiah. What havoc doth he make in the church of God! as if he had been born to ruin religion: as if his only felicity had been to untwist or tear in one day, that holy web, which his father had been weaving nine-and-twenty years; and, contrarily, to set up in one hour that offensive pile, which had been above three hundred years in pulling down: so long had the high places stood. The zeal of Hezekiah, in demolishing them, honored him above all his predecessors; and now, the first act of this green head was their re-edifying. That mischief may be done in a day, which many ages cannot redress.

Fearful were the presages of these bold beginnings. From the misbuilding of these chapels of the hills to the true God, Manasseh proceeds to erecting of altars to a false, even to Baal, the god of Ahab, the stale idol of the heathen. Yet further; not content with so few deities, he worships all the host of heaven; and, that he might despite God yet more, he sets up altars to these abused rivals of their Maker, in the very house of the Lord. That holy place doth he not fear to defile, with the graven image of the grove, that he had made. Never Amorite did so wickedly as Manasseh; and, which was yet worse, it sufficed not to be thus wicked himself, but he seduced God's people to these abominations; and, that his example might move the more, he spares not his own son from

the fire of the idol-sacrifice. Neither were his witcheries less enormous, than his idolatry: he observed times; he used enchantments; he dealt with familiar spirits, and with wizards. Neither were either of these worse than his cruelty: he shed innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem, from one end to another.

O Manasseh, how no less cruel wert thou to thine own soul, than to thy Judah! What a hideous list of monstrous impiety is here; any one of which were enough to draw judgment on a world! but what hell is sufficient for all together?

What brows are not now lifted up, to an attentive expectation of some present and fearful vengeance from God, on such flagitious wickedness? 'Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.' The person of Manasseh is not capable of revenge enough: as his sin dilated itself, by an infectious diffusion to his people, so shall the punishment. We are sensible of the least touch of our own miseries: how rarely are we affected with other men's calamities! yet this evil shall be such, as that the rumor of it shall beat no ear, that shall not glow with an astonishing commiseration. What then, O God, what shall that plague be, which thou threatenest with so much preface of horror? 'I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down: and I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and I will deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil unto all their enemies.'

It is enough, O God, it is enough. What ear can but tingle, what eye can but weep, what hair can but start up, what heart can be but confounded, at the mention of so dreadful a revenge? Can there be a worse judgment than desolation, captivity, desertion, spoil, and torture of prevailing enemies? But, however, other cities and nations have undergone these disasters, without wonder; that all this should befall to thy Jerusalem, the place which thou hast chosen to thyself out of the whole earth, the lot of

thine inheritance, the seat of thine abode, whereof thou hast said, 'Here shall be my rest for ever,' it is able to amaze all eyes, all ears.

No city could fare worse than Samaria; whose inhabitants, after a woful siege, were driven, like cattle, into a wretched servitude. Jerusalem shall fare no better, from Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon; Jerusalem, the glory of the earth, the darling of heaven. See, O ye vain men, that boast of the privileges of chairs and churches, see, and tremble. There is no place under heaven, to which the presence of God is so wedded, as that the sins thereof shall not procure a disdainful and final divorce. The height of former favors shall be but an aggravation of vengeance.

This total vastation of Jerusalem shall take time. Onwards, God begins with the person of wicked Manasseh; against whom, he stirs up the captains of the host of the late friend and old enemy of Judah. Those thorns, amongst which he had shrouded his guilty head, cannot shelter him from their violence. They take him, and bind him with fetters of iron, and carry him to Babylon. There he lies, loaded with chains, in an uncomfortable dungeon, exercised with variety of tortures, fed with such coarse pittances of bread and sips of water, as might maintain an unwilling life to the punishment of the owner.

What eye can now pity the deepest miseries of Manasseh? What, but bondage, can befit him, that hath so lawlessly abused his liberty? What, but an utter abdication, can befit him, that hath cast off his God, and doted on devils? What, but a dying life and a tormenting death, can be fit for a man of blood?

Who, now, would not have given this man for lost; and have looked, when hell should claim her own? But oh the height, oh the depth, of divine mercy! After all these prodigies of sin, Manasseh is a convert; 'When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.' How true is that word of the prophet, 'Vexation gives understanding!' The viper, when he is lashed, casts up his poison. The traitor, when he is racked, tells that truth,

which he had else never uttered. If the cross bear us not to heaven, nothing can. What use were there of the grain, but for the edge of the sickle, wherewith it is cut down; the stroke of the flail, wherewith it is beaten; the weight and attrition of the mill, wherewith it is crushed; the fire of the oven, wherewith it is baken?

Say now, Manasseh, with that grandfather of thine, who was, till now, too good for thee, 'It was good for me that I was afflicted.' Even thine iron was more precious to thee than thy gold: thy jail was a more happy lodging to thee than thy palace: Babylon was a better school to thee than Jerusalem. What fools are we, to frown on our afflictions! These, how crabbed soever, are our best friends. They are not, indeed, for our pleasure; they are for our profit: their issue makes them worthy of a welcome. What do we care, how bitter that potion be, which brings health?

How far a man may go, and yet turn! Could there be fouler sins than these? Lo, here was idolatry in the height, violation of God's house, sorceries of all kinds, bloody cruelty to his own flesh, to the saints of God; and all these against the stream of a religious institution, of the zealous counsels of God's prophets, of the checks of his own heart!

Who can complain, that the way of heaven is blocked up against him, when he sees such a sinner enter? Say the worst against thyself, O thou clamorous soul: here is one, that murdered men, defied God, worshipped devils; and yet finds the way to repentance. If thou be worse than he, deny, if thou canst, that to thyself, which God hath not denied to thee, capacity of grace: in the mean time, know that it is not thy sin, but thine impenitence, that bars heaven against thee.

Presume not yet, O man, whosoever thou art, of the liberty of thy conversion; as if thou couldst run on lawlessly in a course of sinning, till thou come to the brim of hell; and then couldst suddenly stop, and return at leisure. The mercy of God never set period to a wilful sinner: neither yet did his own corrupt desires; so as, when he is gone the furthest, he could yet stay himself from another step. No man, that truly repents, is refused;

but many a one sins so long, that he cannot repent. His custom of wickedness hath obdured his heart, and made it flint to all good impressions. There were Jeroboams, and Abijams, and Ahabs, and Joashes, and Ahazes, in these sacred thrones; there was but one Manasseh. God hath not left in any man's hand the reins of his own heart, to pace, and turn, and stop, as he lists. This privilege is reserved to him that made it. 'It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that showeth mercy;' and that mercy neglected, justly binds over to judgment.

I wonder not at Manasseh, either sinning or repenting: I wonder at thy goodness, O Lord, who, after thy just permission of his sin, callest him thus graciously to repent; and so receivest him repenting: so as Manasseh was not a more loathsome and monstrous spectacle of wickedness, than he is now a pleasing and useful pattern of conversion. Who can now despair of thy mercy, O God, that sees the tears of a Manasseh accepted? When we have debauched our worst, our evil cannot match with thy goodness. Rather it is the praise of thy infinite store, that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. O keep us from a presumption of grace, that we may repent; and raise us from a distrust of grace, when we have repented.

No sooner is Manasseh penitent, than he is free. His prayers have, at once, loosed him from his sins, and from his chains; and of a captive have made him a king; and from the dungeon of Babylon have restored him to the palace of Jerusalem. How easy is it for the same hand that wounds, to cure! What cannot fervent prayers do; either for our rescuing from evil, or for our investing with good!

'Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.' Then? and not before? Could his younger years escape the knowledge of God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians? Could he but know the slaughter, that God's angel made in one night, of a hundred fourscore and five thousand? Could he but have heard the just revenge on Sennacherib? Could he be ignorant of his father's supernatural recovery? Could he but see that everlasting monument of the noted degrees in

the dial of Ahaz? Could he avoid the sense of those fifteen years, which were superadded to his father's age? What one of these proofs doth not evince a Deity? Yet, till his own smart and cure, Manasseh knew not that the Lord was God.

Foolish sinners pay dear for their knowledge; neither will endure to be taught good cheap: so we have seen resty horses, that will not move, till they bleed with the spur: so we have seen dull and careless children, that will learn nothing, but what is put into them with the rod.

The Almighty will be sure to be known for what he is; if not by fair means, yet by foul. If our prosperity, and peace, and sweet experience of his mercy, can win us to acknowledge him, it is more for our ease; but, if we will needs be taught by stripes, it is no less for his glory.

Manasseh now returns another man to Jerusalem. With what indignation doth he look on his old follies! And now, all the amends he can make is, to undo what he did; to do that, which he undid: 'He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord; and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem; and cast them out of the city.' True repentance begins to decline at the ablative; destroying those monuments of shame, which former error had reared. The thorns must first be stubbed up, ere the ground can be capable of seed. The true method of grace is, first, 'Cease to do evil;' then, 'Learn to do good.'

In vain had Manasseh professed a repentance, if the strange gods had still held possession of Jerusalem; if the idol had still harbored in God's temple; if foreign altars had still smoked on the holy mountain. Away with all his trash, when once Manasseh comes to a true sense of piety.

There is nothing but hypocrisy in that penitent, who, after all vows and tears, retains his old abominations. It is that poor piece of satisfaction which we can give to the divine justice, in a hearty indignation to fling down that cup of wickedness, wherewith we have been bewitched, and to trample on the sheards; without which, confession is but wind, and the drops of contrition, water.

The living God loves to dwell clean. He will not come under the roof of idols, nor admit idols to come under his. First therefore, Manasseh casts out the strange gods, and idols, and altars; and then 'he repairs the altar of the Lord, and sacrifices thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings.' Not, till he had pulled down, might he build; and when he had pulled down, he must build. True repentance is no less active of good. What is it the better, if, when the idolatrous altars are defaced, the true God hath not an altar erected to his name? In many altars was superstition; in no altars, atheism.

Neither doth penitent Manasseh build God a new altar, but he repairs the old; which, by long disuse, lay waste, and was mossy and mouldered with age and neglect. God loves well his own institutions: neither can he abide innovations, so much as in the outsides of his services. It is a happy work, to vindicate any ordinance of God from the injuries of times, and to restore it to the original glory.

What have our pious governors done other in religion? Had we gone about to lay a new foundation, the work had been accursed: now, we have only scraped off some superfluous moss, that was grown on these holy stones; we have cemented some broken pieces; we have pointed some crazy corners, with wholesome mortar, instead of base clay, wherewith it was disgracefully patched up. The altar is old; it is God's altar: it is not new; not ours. If we have laid one new stone in this sacred building, let it fly in our faces, and beat out our eyes.

On this repaired altar, doth Manasseh send up the sacrifices of his peace, of his thankfulness; and, doubtless, the God of heaven smells a sweet savor of rest. No perfume is so pleasing to God, as that which is cast in by a penitent hand.

It had not served the turn, that Manasseh had approached alone to this renewed altar. As his lewd example had withdrawn the people from their God; so now 'he commands Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.' Had he been silent, he could not have been unfollowed: every act of greatness is preceptive; but now that religion is made law, what Israelite will not be devout?

The true God hath now no competitor in Judah. All the idols are pulled down; the high places will not be pulled down. An ill guise is easily taken up; it is not so easily left. After a common depravation of religion, it is hard to return to the first purity: as when a garment is deeply soiled, it cannot without many lavers recover the former cleanness.—2 Kings xxi. 2 Chron. xxxiii.

JOSIAH'S REFORMATION.

YET, if we must alter from ourselves, it is better to be a Manasseh, than a Joash. Joash began well, and ended ill; Manasseh began ill, and ended well. His age varied from his youth, no less than one man's condition can vary from another's. His posterity succeeded in both. Amon, his son, succeeded in the sins of Manasseh's youth; Josiah, his grandchild, succeeded in the virtues of his age.

What a vast difference doth grace make in the same age! Manasseh began his reign at twelve years; Josiah at eight: Manasseh was religiously bred under Hezekiah; Joash was mis-nurtured under Amon: and yet, Manasseh runs into absurd idolatries; Josiah is holy and devout. The Spirit of God breathes freely; not confining itself to times or means.

No rules can bind the hands of the Almighty. It is, in ordinary proof, too true a word, that was said of old, 'Wo be to thee, O land, whose king is a child!' The goodness of God makes his own exceptions. Judah never fared better, than in the green years of a Josiah: if we may not rather measure youth and age, by government and disposition, than by years. Surely thus, Josiah was older with smooth cheeks, than Manasseh with gray hairs. Happy is the infancy of princes, when it falls into the hands of faithful counsellors.

A good pattern is no small help for young beginners. Josiah sets his father David before him; not Amon; not Manasseh. Examples are the best rules for the inexperienced: where their choice is good, the directions are easiest. The laws of God are the ways of David. Those

laws were the rule; these ways were the practice. Good Josiah walks in all the ways of his father David.

Even the minority of Josiah was not idle: we cannot be good too early. At eight years, it was enough to have his ear open to hear good counsel, to have his eyes and heart open to seek after God: at twelve he begins to act, and shows well that he hath found the God he sought. Then he addresses himself to purge Judah and Jerusalem, from the high places, groves, images, altars, wherewith it was defiled; burning the bones of the idolatrous priests on their altars; strewing the ashes of the idols on the graves of them that had sacrificed to them; striving, by those fires and mattocks, to testify his zealous detestation of all idolatry.

The house must first be cleansed, ere it can be garnished. No man will cast away his cost on unclean heaps. So soon as the temple was purged, Josiah bends his thoughts on the repairing and beautifying of this house of the Lord.

What stir was there in Judah, wherein God's temple suffered not? Six several times was it pillaged, whether out of force or will; first, Jehoash king of Judah is fain by the spoil of it to stop the mouth of Hazael; then Joash king of Israel fills his own hands with that sacred spoil, in the days of Amaziah; after this, Ahaz rifles it for Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria; then, Hezekiah is forced to ransack the treasures of it for Sennacherib; yet after, the sacrilege of Manasseh makes that booty of it, which his later times endeavored to restore; and now lastly, Amon his son neglects the frame, embezzles the furniture, of this holy place. The very pile began to complain of age and unrespect. Now comes good Josiah: and, in his eighteenth year, when other young gallants would have thought of nothing but pleasure and jollity, takes up the latest care of his father David, and gives order for the repairing of the temple.

The keepers of the door have received the contribution of all faithful Jews, for this pious use. The king sends Shaphan the scribe to Hilkiah the priest to sum it up, and to deliver it unto carpenters and masons, for so holy a work.

How well doth it beseem the care of a religious prince, to set the priests and scribes in hand with re-edifying the temple! The command is the king's; the charge is the high-priest's; the execution is the workmen's. When the laborers are faithful in doing the work, and the high-priest in the directing it, and the king in enjoining it, God's house cannot fail of a happy perfection; but when any of these slacken, the business must needs languish.

How God blesses the devout endeavors of his servants! While Hilkiah was diligently surveying the breaches and the reparation of the temple, he lights on the book of the law. The authentic and original book of God's law was, by a special charge, appointed to be carefully kept within a safe shrine, in the sanctuary. In the depraved times of idolatry, some faithful priest, to make sure work, had locked it fast up in some corner of the temple, from the reach of all hands, of all eyes: as knowing how impossible it was, that divine monument could otherwise escape the fury of profane guiltiness. Some few transcripts there were doubtless, parcels of this sacred book, in other hands: neither doubt I, but, as Hilkiah had been formerly well acquainted with this holy volume, now of long time hid, so the ears of good Josiah had been inured to some passages thereof; but the whole body of these awful records, since the late night of idolatrous confusion and persecution, saw no light till now. This precious treasure doth Hilkiah find, while he digs for the temple. Never man labored to the reparation of God's church, but he met with a blessing more than he looked for.

Hilkiah the priest and Shaphan the scribe do not engross this invaluable wealth into their own hands, nor suppress these more than sacred rolls for their own advantage; but transmit them, first to the ears of the king, then, by him, to the people. It is not the praise of a good scribe, to lay up, but to bring forth, both old and new: and if the priests' lips shall keep knowledge, they keep it to impart, not to smother; 'The people shall seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.'

So soon as the good king hears the words of the book of the law, and, in special, those dreadful threats of judgment denounced against the idolatries of his Judah, he

rends his clothes, to show his heart rent with sorrow, and fearful expectation of those plagues; and washes his bosom with tears. Oh gracious tenderness of Josiah! He doth but once hear the law read, and is thus humbled; humbled for his father's sins, for the sins of his people: how many of us, after a thousand hammerings of the menaces of God's law, on our guilty souls, continue yet insensible of our danger! The very reading of this law doth thus affect him; the preaching of it stirs not us; the sins of others struck thus deep with him; our own are slighted by us. A soft heart is the best tempered for God: so physicians are wont to like those bodies best, which are easiest to work on: O God, make our clay, wax; and our wax pliable to thy hand; so shall we be sure to be free, either from sin, or from the hurt of sin.

It is no holy sorrow, that sends us not to God. Josiah is not moped with a distractive grief, or an astonishing fear; but, in the height of his passion, sends five choice messengers to Huldah the prophetess, to inquire of the Lord, for himself, for Judah. It is a happy trouble, that drives us to this refuge.

I do not hear any of these courtiers reply to this godly motion of their young king; 'Alas, Sir, what means this deep perplexity? What needs all this busy inquisition? If your father were idolatrous, what is that to you who have abandoned his sins? If your people were once idolatrous, what is that to you, yea to them, who have expiated these crimes by their repentance? Have you not carefully reformed all those abuses? Hath not your happy reformation made an abundant amends for those wrongs? Spare your tears, and save the labor of your messengers. All is well; all shall be well. These judgments are for the obstinate. Had we been still guilty, these fears had been just. Were we still in danger, what had we gained by our conversion?' Rather, as glad to second the religious cares of their young king, they feed his holy anxieties, with a just aggravation of peril; and, by their good counsel, whet these his zealous desires of a speedy resolution. That state cannot but be happy, whose priests and peers are ready, as to suggest, so to cherish and execute, the devout projects of their sovereigns.

The grave priest, the learned scribe, the honorable

courtiers, do not disdain to knock at the door of a prophetess: neither doth any of them say; 'It were hard if we should not have as much acquaintance with God, as a woman;' but, in an humble acknowledgment of her graces, they come to learn the will of God from her mouth. True piety is modest, and stands not on terms of reputation, in the businesses of God; but willingly honors his gifts in any subject, least of all in itself.

The sex is not more noted in Huldah, than the condition. As she was a woman, so a wife; the wife of Shallum. Holy matrimony was no hindrance to her divine revelations. She was, at once, a prophetess in her college, a housewife in her family. It was never the practice of God, to confine his graces to virginity.

At this very time, the famous prophet Jeremiah florished. Some years had he already spent in this public service. Why was not he rather consulted by Josiah? It is not unlike, that some prophetical employments called him away, at this time, from Jerusalem. His presence could not have been balked: purposely, doubtless, doth God cast his message on the point of that absence, that he might honor the weaker vessel with his divine oracle, and exercise the humility of so great clients. In the answers of God, it is not to be regarded, who speaks, but from whom. The injury redounds to God, if the weaknesses of the person cause us to undervalue the authority of the function.

As Josiah and his messengers do not despise Huldah, because she was a woman; so Huldah doth not flatter Josiah, because a king: 'Go, tell the man that sent you, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place.' Lo, he, that was as God to his subjects, is but as man to the prophetess: neither is the message ever the sweeter, because it is required by a prince. No circumstance may vary the form of divine truth. Evil must befall Jerusalem and Judah; yea, all the words of that book must alight on the inhabitants of both.

In how bad a case we may be; and yet think ourselves not safe only, but happy! These Jews had forgotten their old revolts; and now, having framed themselves to holy courses, promised themselves nothing but peace, when the

prophetess foresees and foretells their approaching ruin. Even their old score must be paid, after the opinion of a clear agreement. In vain shall we hope to quit our arrearages by prorogation.

This prophetess had immediate visions from God, yet she must speak out of the book. There was never any revelation from the Lord, that crossed his writings. His hand and his tongue agree eternally. If that book have cursed Judah, she may not absolve it.

Yet, what a gracious mixture was here, of mercy with severity; severity to Judah, mercy to Josiah! Judah shall be plagued, and shall become a desolation and a curse; Josiah shall be quietly housed in his grave, before this storm fall on Judah. His eye shall not see, what his people shall feel. It is enough, that the expectation of those evils afflict him; the sense shall not.

Whence is this indulgence? 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord.' How happy a thing it is, to be agreed unto God's judgments, rather than an oak! The meek and gentle reed stoops, and therefore stands; the oak stands stiffly out against the strongest gust, and therefore is turned up by the roots. At least, let us lament those sins we have not avoided; and mourn for the sins of others, while we hate our own.

He, that found himself exempted from this vengeance, by his repentance and deep humiliation, would fain find the same way for the deliverance of his people. The same words of the Law therefore, that had wrought on his heart, are by him caused to be publicly read, in the ears of Judah and Jerusalem. The assembly is universal, of priests, prophets, people, both small and great; because the sin was such, the danger was such: that no man may complain to want information, the law of God sounds in every ear. If our ear be shut to the law, the sin is ours; but, if the law be shut to our ears, the sin is of our governors. Wo be to them that hide God's book from the people, as they would do ratsbane from the eyes of children! Ignorant souls cannot perish without their murder. There is no fear of knowing too much; there is too much fear of practising too little.

Now, if the people do not imitate their king in relenting,

they are not worthy to partake with him in his impunity. Howsoever, they shall not want a great example, as of sorrow, so of amendment. Good Josiah stands by the pillar, and solemnly renews his covenant with his God. The people cannot for shame refuse to second him. Even they, that looked for a destruction, yet do not withdraw their obedience. God's children may not be sullen under his corrections; but, whether they expect or feel smart, are no other than dutiful to his awful hand.

As a man, that finds he hath done something that might endanger the forfeit of his favor, puts himself into some deserving action, whereby he may hope to re-endear himself, so doth Josiah here. No endeavor is enough to testify his zeal to that name of God, which was so profaned by his people's idolatry. Whatever monuments were yet remaining of wicked paganism, he defaces with indignation. He burns the vessels of Baal, and puts down his Chemarim; destroys the houses of the Sodomites; strews the powder of their idols in the brook Kedron; defiles Topheth; takes away the horses of the sun; burns the chariots of the sun with fire; and omits nothing, that might reconcile God, clear Judah, perfect a reformation.

Neither is this care confined to Jerusalem and the neighboring towns, but stretches itself to the utmost coasts of Josiah's kingdom. Bethel was the infamous seat of the pollution of Israel. It seems the heirs of Jeroboam, who set up his golden calf there, enjoyed it not long. The kings of Judah recovered it to their crown; but it had not yet recovered itself from that ancient infection. Thither doth good Josiah send the unhallowed ashes of Baal's relics, to stain that altar first, which he will soon after deface.

The time was, and it was no less than three hundred and fifty years since, that the man of God, out of Judah, cried against Jeroboam's altar; 'O altar, altar; thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places, that burn incense upon thee; and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.' And now is the hour come, wherein every one of those words shall be accomplished.

It could not but be a great confirmation to Josiah, to see that God so long ago foremarked him for his own, and forenamed him to so zealous a service. All our names are equally foreknown of that Divine Providence, though not forespoken: neither can any act pass from us, which was not predetermined in that eternal counsel of the Almighty; neither can any act, that is predetermined, be unfulfilled on earth. Intervention of time breaks no squares in the divine decrees. Our purblind eyes see nothing, but that which toucheth their lids; the quick sight of God's prescience sees that, as present, which is a world off.

According to the prediction, the stench of dead men's bones is a fit perfume to send up from this altar to heaven, whose best sacrifices savored worse in the nostrils of God; and the blood of the idolatrous sacrificers was a meet oblation to that God, who had been dishonored by their burnt-offerings to his base corrivals.

Even that prophet, who foretold this, had his tomb in Bethel; and that tomb had his inscription. His weakness might not rob him of the honor of his sepulture.

How palpably do these Israelites condemn themselves, while they reserve so famous a monument of their own conviction!

It was no prejudice to this holy prophet, that his bones lay amongst the sepulchres of idolaters. His epitaph preserved those bones from burning on that altar, which he had accursed. As the lion might not tear his carcass, when he died; so now, the fury of the multitude may not violate the very bones in his grave. I do not see Josiah save them for relics; I hear him command they shall rest in peace. It is fit the dead bodies of God's saints should be as free from contempt as from superstition.

After the removal of these rites of false worship, it is time to bring in the true. Now, a solemn Passover shall be kept unto the Lord, by the charge of Josiah. That Book of the Law sets him the time, place, circumstances, of this sacrament. His zeal so carefully follows it, that, since the days of Samuel, this feast was never so gloriously, so punctually celebrated. Jerusalem is the place; the fourteenth day of the first month is the time; the Levites are the actors; a yearling and spotless lamb

is the provision. No bone of it is broken; the blood is sprinkled on the door-posts; it is roasted whole, eaten with sour herbs, with bread unleavened; the remainder is consumed by fire. The law, the sacrifices, had been in vain, if the passover had been neglected. No true Israelite might want, whether this monument of their deliverance past, or this type of the Messiah to come. Rather than fail, Josiah's bounty shall supply to Judah lambs for their paschal devotion. No alms is so acceptable as that whereby the soul is furthered.—2 Kings xxii. xxiii. 2 Chron. xxxiv. xxxv.

JOSIAH'S DEATH; WITH THE DESOLATION OF THE TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM.

Josiah hath now happily settled the affairs, both of God and the state; and now hath sweet leisure to enjoy himself and his people. His conscience doth not more cheer him at home, than his subjects abroad. Never king reigned with more officious piety to God, with more love and applause of men.

But what stability is there in these earthly things? How seldom is excellency, in any kind, long-lived! In the very strength of his age, in the height of his strength, is Josiah withdrawn from the earth: as not without a merciful intention of his glory, on God's behalf; so, not without some weakness, on his own. Pharaoh Nechoh, king of Egypt, comes up to fight against the king of Assyria. What is that to Josiah? Perhaps, the Egyptians attempted to pass through the land of Judah, towards Carchemish, the seat of his war; but, as a neighbor, not as an enemy. Josiah resists him; as neither holding it safe to admit a foreign power into the bosom of his country, nor daring to give so fair an occasion of provoking the Assyrian hostility against him.

The king of Egypt mildly deprecates this enmity. He sends ambassadors to Josiah, saying, 'What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee, this day; but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste. Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not.'

What friend could have said more? What prophet could have advised more holily? Why doth not good Josiah say with himself; 'There may be truth in this suggestion. God may have sent this man, to be a scourge of my old enemy, of Ashur. If the hand of the Almighty be in this design, why do I oppose it? The quarrel is not mine: why do I thrust my finger into this flame, unbidden? Wherefore should I hazard the effusion of blood, on a harmless passage? Can I hear him plead a command from God, and not inquire into it? How easy is it for me, to know the certainty of this pretended commission! Have not I the priests and prophets of God about me? Let me first go and consult his oracle. If God have sent him and forbidden me, why should my courage carry me against my piety?'

It is strange, that the good heart of Josiah could escape these thoughts, these resolutions: yet, he, that on the general threats of God's law against Judah, sends messengers to inquire of a prophetess, now, on these particular threats of danger to himself, speaks not, stirs not. The famous prophet Jeremiah was then living, and Zephaniah; besides a whole college of seers. Josiah doth not so much as send out of doors, to ask, 'Shall I go up against the king of Egypt?' Sometimes, both grace and wit are asleep, in the holiest and wariest breasts. The best of all God's saints may be sometimes miscarried, by their passions, to their cost.

The wise providence of God hath mercifully determined to leave Josiah to his own counsels; that, by the weakness of his servant, he might take occasion to perfect his glory. Even that, wherein Josiah was wanting unto God, shall concur to the making up of God's promise to Josiah. When we are the most blindfolded, we run on the ways of God's hidden decrees; and, whatever our intents be, cannot, if we would, go out of that unknown path.

Needs will Josiah put himself into arms, against an unwilling enemy; and, to be less noted, disguises himself. The fatal arrow of an Egyptian archer finds him out in the throng, and gives him his death's-wound. Now, too late, he calls to a retreat. His changed chariot is

turned to a bier, to carry his bleeding corpse to his grave, in Jerusalem.

What eye doth not now pity and lament the untimely end of a Josiah? Whom can it choose but affect, to see a religious, just, virtuous prince snatched away in the vigor of his age? After all our foolish moan, the providence, that directed that shaft to his lighting-place, intends that wound for a stroke of mercy. The God, whom Josiah serves, looks through his death, at his glory; and, by this sudden violence, will deliver him from the view and participation of the miseries of Judah, which had been many deaths; and fetches him to the participation of that happiness, which could countervail more deaths, than could be incident to a Josiah. Oh the wonderful goodness of the Almighty, whose very judgments are merciful! Oh the safe condition of God's children, whom very pain easeth, whom death revives, whom dissolution unites, whom, lastly, their very sin, and temptation, glorifies!

How happily hath Josiah gained by this change! Instead of a froward people, he now is sorted with saints and angels; instead of a fading and corruptible crown, he now enjoys an eternal.

The orphan subjects are ready to weep out their eyes for sorrow. Their loss cannot be so great, as his gain. He is glorious; they, as their sins had deserved, miserable. If the separated soul could be capable of passion, could Josiah have seen, after his departure, the calamities of his sons, of his people, it could not but have laid siege to his peace.

The sad subjects proclaim his son Jehoahaz king, instead of so lamented a father. He both doth ill, and fares ill. By that time he hath sat but three months in the throne, Pharaoh Nechoh, king of Egypt, seconds the father's death with the son's captivity. This victorious enemy puts down the wicked son of Josiah, and lades him with chains at Riblath, in the land of Hamath; and lades his people with a tribute of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold; yet, as if he, that was unwilling to fight with Josiah, were no less unwilling to root out his posterity, this Egyptian sets Eliakim, the second

son of Josiah, on the seat of his father; and, that he might be all his, changes his name to Jehoiakim. Oh the woful and unworthy succession of Josiah! one son is a prisoner, the other is a tributary; both are wicked.

After that Jehoiakim hath been some years Pharaoh's bailiff, to gather and rack the dear rents of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, comes up, and sweeps away both the lord and his feodary, Pharaoh and Jehoiakim. So far was the ambitious Egyptian from maintaining his encroachment on the territories of Judah, that he could not now hold his own. From Nilus to Euphrates, all is lost. So subject are the lesser powers still to be swallowed up of the greater. So just it is with God, that they, which will be affecting undue enlargement of their estates, should fall short of what they had.

Jehoiakim is carried in fetters to Babylon; and now in that dungeon of his captivity, hath more leisure, than grace, to bethink himself of all his abominations; and while he inherits the sad lodging of his great grandfather Manasseh, inherits not his success.

While he is rotting in this jail, his young son Jehoiachin starts up in his throne; like to a mushroom, that rises up in a night, and withers in a day. Within three months and ten days, is that young prince, the meet son of such a father, fetched up in irons to his father's prison.

Neither shall he go alone. His attendance shall add to his misery. His mother, his wives, his officers, his peers, his craftsmen, his warriors, accompany him, manacled and chained, to their perpetual bondage.

Now, according to Isaiah's word, it would have been great preferment for the fruit of Hezekiah's loins, to be pages in the court of Babylon.

One only branch yet remains of the unhappy stock of holy Josiah, Mattaniah, the brother of Jehoiakim; whom Nebuchadnezzar, changing his name to Zedekiah, sets up in that forlorn and tributary throne. There might he have lived, though an underling, yet peaceable. This man, to make up the measure of God's just judgments, as he was ever a rebel to God, so proves rebellious to his sovereign

master, the king of Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah hath forewarned him in vain. Nothing could teach this man, but smart.

Who can look for other than fury from Nebuchadnezzar, against Jerusalem; which now had affronted him with three several successions of revolts and conspiracies against his government, and thrice abused his bounty and indulgence? With a mighty army doth he therefore come up against his seditious deputy; and besieges Jerusalem, and blocks it up with forts round about. After two years' siege, the Chaldees without and the famine within have prevailed. King Zedekiah and his soldiers are fled away by night; as thinking themselves happy, if they might abandon their walls, and save their lives.

The Chaldees, as caring more for the birds than for the nest, pursue them; and overtake Zedekiah, forsaken of all his forces, in the plain of Jericho, and bring him to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

What can so unthankful and perfidious a vassal expect, but the worst of revenge? The sentence is fearful: first, the sons of Zedekiah are slain before his eyes; then, those eyes of his, as if they had seen enough when they had seen him childless, are put out. His eyes are only lent him so long, as to torment him with the sight of his own utmost discomfort. Had his sons but overlived his eyes, the grief had been so much the less, as the apprehension of it had been less lively and piercing: now, this woful object shall shut up his sight; that even when his bodily eyes are gone, yet the eyes of his mind might ever see what he last saw; that thus his sons might be ever dying before him, and himself in their death ever miserable.

Who doth not now wish, that the blood of Hezekiah and Josiah could have been severed from these impure dregs of their lewd issue? No man could pity the offenders, were it not for the mixture of the interest of so holy progenitors.

No more sorrow can come in at the windows of Zedekiah: more shall come in at his doors. His ears shall receive what more to rue for his Jerusalem. Nebuzara-

dan, the great marshal of the king of Babylon, comes up against that deplored city, and breaks down the walls of it round about; and burns the temple of the Lord, and the king's house, and every fair palace of Jerusalem, with fire; drives away the remainder of her inhabitants into captivity; carries away the last spoils of the glorious temple.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the wonder of all times, the paragon of nations, the glory of the earth, the favorite of Heaven, how art thou now become heaps of ashes, hills of rubbish, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin! If later, yet no less deep, hast thou now pledged that bitter cup of God's vengeance, to thy sister Samaria. How carefully had thy God forewarned thee! 'Though Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah sin.' Lo now, as thine iniquities, so thy judgments have overtaken her. Both lie together in the dust; both are made a curse to all posterities. O God, what place shall thy justice spare, if Jerusalem have perished? If that delight of thine were cut off for her wickedness, 'Let us not be high-minded, but fear.'

What pity it was, to see those goodly cedars of the temple flaming up higher than they stood in Lebanon! to see those curious marbles, which never felt the dent of the pickaxe or hammer in the laying, wounded with mattocks, and wounding the earth in their fall! to see the Holy of Holies, whereinto none might enter but the high-priest, once a year, thronged with pagans; the vails rent, the sacred ark of God violated and defaced, the tables overturned, the altars broken down, the pillars demolished, the pavements digged up, yea the very ground, where that famous pile stood, deformed! O God, thou wouldst rather have no visible house on earth, than endure it defiled with idolatries.

Four hundred thirty and six years had that temple stood, and beautified the earth, and honored heaven: now, it is turned into rude heaps. There is no prescription to be pleaded for the favor of the Almighty. Only that temple, not made with hands, is eternal in the heavens. Thither may he graciously bring us, that hath ordained

us thither; for the sake of that glorious High Priest, that hath once for all entered into that Holy of Holies, Amen! —2 Kings xxiii. 2 Chron. xxxv. xxxvi.

BOOK XXI.

ZERUBBABEL AND EZRA.

THE first transportation into Babylon, under Jehoiakim, wherein Daniel, Ezekiel, and many other of the best note, were driven into captivity, was, some eleven years after, followed with a second, under Zedekiah, wherein the remnant of the now-ruined Jerusalem and Judah were swept away.

Seventy years was the period of their longest servitude. While Babylon was a queen, Judah was her vassal: when that proud tyranness fell, God's people began to rise again. The Babylonian monarchy was no sooner swallowed up of the Persian, than the Jews felt the comfort of liberty: for Cyrus, conquering Babylon, and finding the Jews groaning under that captivity, straight releases them; and sends them, under the conduct of their captain Zerubbabel, back to their almost-forgotten country.

The world stands on vicissitudes. Every nation hath her turn, and must make up her measure. Threescore and ten years ago, it was the course of Judah; the iniquity of that rebellious people was full: some hundred and thirty years before that, was the turn of Samaria and her Israelites: now, the staff is come to the doors of Babylon; even that, wherewith Judah was beaten: and those Persians, which are now victorious, must have their term also. It is in vain, for any earthly state to promise to itself an immutable condition. At last, the rod, that scourged God's children, is cast into the fire: 'Thou hast remembered, O Lord, the children of Edom, in the day of Jerusalem, how they said, Down with it, down with it, even to the ground: O daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery, how happy is he, that rewardeth

thee, as thou hast served them!' It is Cyrus, that hath wrought this revenge, this rescue.

Doubtless, it did not a little move Cyrus to this favor, that he found himself honorably forenamed in these Jewish prophecies, and foreappointed to this glorious service, no less than a hundred and seventy years before he was. (Is. xliv. 28.) Who would not be glad, to make good so noble and happy a destiny? O God, if we hear that thou hast ordained us to life, how gladly, how carefully, should we work out our salvation! if to good works, how should we abound!

In the first year of his monarchy, doth Cyrus both make proclamations, and publish them in writing through all his kingdom: wherein he both professeth his zealous resolutions and desires to build up God's house in Jerusalem, and enjoins and encourages all the Jews through his dominions to address themselves to that sacred work, and incites all his subjects to aid them with silver, and gold, and goods, and beasts. How gracious was the command of that, whereof the very allowance was a favor!

Was it Cyrus that did this? Was it not thou, O God, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, that stirredst up the spirit of that Persian; as if he had been more than a son of thy church, a father? How easy is it for thee, to make very pagans protectors to thy church; enemies, benefactors!

Not with an empty grace, doth this great king dismiss the Jews, but with a royal bounty; he brings forth 'the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;' and causes them to be numbered by his treasurer to the hands of Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, for the use of the temple; no fewer than five thousand and four hundred vessels of gold and silver.

Certainly, this great monarch wanted not wit to think; 'It is a rich booty that I find in the temples of Babylon: by the law of conquest, it is mine: having vanquished their gods, I may well challenge their spoil. How seasonably doth it now fall into my hands, on this victory, to reward my soldiers, to settle my new empire! What

if this treasure came from Jerusalem? The propriety is now altered: the very place, according to the conceit of the Jews, hath profaned it. The true God, I have heard, is curious; neither will abide those vessels, which have been polluted with idolatrous uses. It shall be enough, if I loose the bonds of this miserable people. If I give liberty, let the next give wealth. They will think themselves happy in bare walls, in their native earth. To what purpose should I pamper their penury, with a sudden store?'

But the princely heart of Cyrus would admit of no such base sacrilegious thoughts. Those vessels, that he finds stamped with God's mark, he will return to their owner. Neither his own occasions, nor their abuse, shall be any color of their detention. O Cyrus, how many close-handed, gripple-minded Christians shall once be choked in judgment, with the example of thy just munificence! Thou restoredst that, which we purloin. Wo be to those houses, that are stored with the spoils of God's temple! Wo be to those fingers, that are tainted with holy treasures!

Kings can hardly do good alone. Their laws are not more followed, than their examples. No sooner do the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites set their faces towards Jerusalem for the building of the temple, than the liberal hands of their pagan neighbors furnish them with gold, and silver, and precious things. Every Persian is glad to be at the charge of laying a stone in God's house. The same God, that had given them these metals out of his coffers of the earth, gives it out of their coffers to his temple. He, that took away by the Chaldees, gives by the Persians. Where the Almighty intends a work, there cannot be any want of means.

Thus heartened, thus laded, do the joyful families of Judah return to their old home. How many thousands of them were worn out and lost, in that seventy years' servitude! How few of them yet survived, that could know the place of their birth and habitation; or say, 'Here stood the temple, here the palace!'

Amongst those forty-and-two thousand three hundred and threescore Jews (besides servants seven thousand

three hundred and thirty-seven) that returned in this first expedition, there were, whom the confusion of their long captivity had robbed of their pedigree. They knew themselves Jews, but could not derive their line. These were yet admitted, without difficulty; but those of the priestly tribe, which could not deduce their genealogy from the register, are cashiered as unclean.

Then, God would be served in a blood; now, in a due succession. If we could not fetch the line of our pedigree from Christ and his apostles, we were not fit for the evangelical altars. Their calling was by nature; ours by grace; the grace of inward abilities, of outward ordination: if we cannot approve both these, we are justly abandoned.

Now had the children of Israel taken down their harps from the willows which grew by the waters of Babylon, and could, unbidden, sing the true songs of their recovered Sion.

They are newly settled in their old mansions; when, on the first public feast, in the autumn immediately following their return, they flock up to Jerusalem. Their first care is their public sacrifice. That school of their captivity, wherein they have been long trained, hath taught them to begin with God. A forced discontinuance makes devotion more savory, more sweet, to religious hearts; whereas, in an open freedom, piety doth too often languish.

Joshua the priest, and Zerubbabel the prince, are fitly joined in the building of the altar: neither of their hands may be out of that sacred work. No sooner is that set on the bases, than it is employed to the daily burnt-offerings. The altar may not stay the leisure of the temple. God's church may not want her oblations. He can be none of the sons of Israel, that doth not every day renew his acknowledgments of God.

How feelingly do these Jews keep their Feast of Tabernacles, while their sojourning in Babylon was still in their thoughts; while as yet their tents must supply their ruined houses! The first motions of zeal are commonly strong and fervent.

How carefully do these governors and priests make

preparation for God's temple! Carpenters and masons are hired. Tyrian workmen are again called for; and Lebanon is now anew solicited for cedar trees.

The materials are ready. Every Israelite with such courage addresses himself to this service, as if his life lay in those stones. And now, while the foundation of the temple was laying, the priests stand in their habits with trumpets, the Levites with cymbals; interchanging their holy music, and melodiously singing praises to the God of Israel, who had turned their captivity as the streams in the south, and honored their eyes and hands with the first stones of his house. The people second their songs with shouts. The earth sounds, and heaven rings, with the joyful acclamations of the multitude.

It is no small comfort in a good action, to have begun well. The entrance of any holy enterprise is commonly encountered with many discouragements; which, if we have once overcome, the passage is smooth.

How would these men have shouted at the laying on of the last stone of the battlements, who are thus joyed with laying the first stones of the foundation! The end of any thing is better than the beginning: that hath certainty, this danger; this labor, that rest. Little did these men think, that, for all this, few of them should live to see the roof.

What different affections shall we see produced in men, by the same occasion! The younger Jews shouted at this sight; the elder wept. The younger shouted to see a new foundation; the elder wept to remember the old. They, who had seen no better, thought this goodly; they, who had seen the former, thought this mean and homely; more sorrowing for what they had lost, than rejoicing in so unequal a reparation.

As it may fall out, it is some piece of misery, to have been happier. Every abatement of the degrees of our former height lays siege to our thankfulness, for lesser mercies. Sometimes, it proves an advantage, to have known no better. He shall more comfortably enjoy present benefits, who takes them as they are, without any other comparisons, than of the weakness of his own deservings. It is nothing to me, what myself or others

have been, so I be now well. Neither is it otherwise in particular churches: if one be more gloriously built than another, yet, if the foundation be rightly laid in both, one may not insult, the other may not repine: each must congratulate the truth to other; each must thankfully enjoy itself.

The noise was not more loud, than confused. Here was a discordant mixture of lamentation and shouting. It was hard to say whether drowned the other.

This assembly of Jews was a true image of God's church on earth; one sings, another cries; never doth it all either laugh or mourn at once. It shall be in our triumph, that all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; till then, our passions must be mixed, according to the occasions.

The Jews are busy at work; not more full of joy, than hopes: and now that the walls begin to overlook the earth, their thoughts seem to overlook the walls. But what great enterprise was ever set on foot for God, which found not some crosses?

There was a mongrel brood of Samarit-Assyrians, which, ever since the days of Sennacherib, dwelt in the land of Israel; whose religion was a patched coat of several shreds; some little part Jewish, the rest Pagan, not without much variety of idolatry.

These hollow neighbors proffer their assistance to the children of the captivity; 'Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and do sacrifice to him.' Might men be their own judges, there would be no heresy in the world, no misworship. It is true, these men did sacrifice to the true God. The lions taught them to seek, and the Israelitish priest taught them to find, the fashions of the God of the land. Some of these Jews knew their devotion of old. They served Israel's God; but with their own. As good no God, as too many.

In a just indignation therefore, do these Jewish governors repel the partnership of such helpers; 'You have nothing to do with us, to build an house to our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel.' The hand of an idolater is contagious. Yet, had it been to the building of some fortress or common-hall,

perhaps their aid had not been refused; but when the walls of God's house are to be raised, this society had been piacular.

Those, that may not be allowed to help the work, will ask no leave to hinder it: their malicious suggestions weaken the hands of the people of Judah, and stir up authority to suppress them.

Cyrus was far off; neither lived he long after that gracious commission; and besides was so taken up the while with his wars, that he could not have leisure to sift those querulous accusations. Now therefore, during the last years of Cyrus, and the reign of his son Cambyses, and the long government of Darius Histaspides, and of his son Xerxes or Ahasuerus, and lastly of his son Artaxerxes, until the days of Darius Nothus, which was no less than five successions of kings besides Cyrus, do the walls of the temple stand still, yea lie waste; subject to the wrongs of time, and weather: the fit matter of sorrow to the Jews, insultation to the enemies, derision to passengers.

What a wide gap of time was here, betwixt the foundation of God's house, and the battlements! How large a trial doth God now secondly take of the faith, of the patience, of his people! How large a proof doth he give of his own long-suffering! O God, when thou hadst but one house on earth, thou wert content to put up delays, yea affronts, in the building of it: now thou hast many, it is no marvel, if thy longanimity and justice abide some of them to lie desolate. They are not stones, nor metals, nor men, that can make thee more glorious: thou best knowest, when to serve thyself of all these; when to honor these with thy service.

A small matter hinders the worthiest action; as a little fish, they say, stays the greatest ship. Before, the Jews were discouraged with words; but now they are stopped by commands.

These envious Samaritans have corrupted the governors, which the Persian kings set over those parts; and from their hands have obtained letters of deep calumniation, to Ahasuerus the king; and after him, to his son Artaxerxes: wherein Jerusalem is charged with old re-

bellion to kings; and for proof, appellation is made to the records; from which evidence is spitefully inferred, that if these walls be once built, the king shall receive no tribute on this side the river. Never was God's church but subject to reproaches.

Princes have reason to be jealous of their rights. The records are searched. It soon appears, that, within one century of years, Jerusalem had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar; and held out two years' siege of that great Babylonian. The scandal of disloyalty is perpetual: although indeed they held him rather a prevailing enemy, than a lawful sovereign. One act disparages either place, or person, to all posterities. Therefore shall the walls of Jerusalem lie waste, because it had once been treacherous. After a hundred years, doth that city rue one perfidious act of Zedekiah. Fidelity to our governors is ever both safe and honorable.

Command is now sent out from Artaxerxes (surnamed Long-hand), even the son of queen Esther, to restrain the work. All respects must cease with carnal minds, when their honors and profits are in question. Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, come now armed with authority. The sword hath easily prevailed against the trowel. Still do the Jews find themselves, as it were, captives at home; and in silence and sorrow, cease from their labors, until the days of the next successor, Darius Nothus.

As those that had learned to sow after a bad crop, these Jews, on the change of the prince, by the encouragement of the prophets of God, Haggai and Zechariah, take new heart to build again. If others' power hinder us in the work of God, our will may not be guilty.

Their new governors come, as before, to expostulate; "Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?' and what are your names?' They wisely and modestly plead the service of the God of heaven, the decree of Cyrus; still persisting to build, as if the prohibition of Artaxerxes had died with the author.

The unpartial governors do neither claw nor exasperate; but relating the humble and just answer of the Jews, move the king that search may be made in the rolls of

Babylon, whether such an edict were made by Cyrus; and require his royal pleasure, concerning the validity of such a pretended decree. Darius searches, finds, ratifies, enlargeth it; not only charging his officers not to hinder the work, but commanding to levy sums of his own tribute, beyond the river, for the expenses of the building, for the furnishing of sacrifices; threatening utter ruin to the house of that man, and death to his person, who should offer to impeach this bounty; and shutting up with a zealous imprecation, 'The God of heaven that hath caused his name to dwell there, destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter to destroy this house of God, which is at Jerusalem: I Darius have made a decree, let it be done with speed.'

Who would have looked for such an edict from a Persian? No Solomon, no David, could have said more. The Ruler of all hearts makes choice of his own instruments; and, when he pleaseth, can glorify himself by those means, which are least expected. That sacred work, which the husband and son of an Esther crossed, shall be happily accomplished by a Darius.

In the sixth year of his reign, is the temple of God fully finished; and now, the dedication of it is celebrated, by a joyful feast. A hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, in a meet proportion, smoke on their altars. And now, the children of the captivity think this day a sufficient payment for all their sorrows. We have reason to think it the fairest day that ever shone forth to us, wherein the spiritual building of God's house is raised up in our souls. How should we shout at the laying of this foundation, and feast at the laying on of the roof! What other, what better sacrifice can we offer up to God, in the sense of our joy, than ourselves? Let our hearts be, at once, the temple, the altar, the sacrifice. O God, be thou glorified in all these, who hast graciously honored all these with thyself.

Every holy feast is now duly kept; the priests know their divisions, the Levites their courses; and the whole service of God is put into a settled order. But, as there can be no new beginnings without imperfection, nor long

continuance without corruption; reformation is no less necessary than good institutions.

Artaxerxes Mnemon (the mindful) hath learned of his father Darius, to befriend God's people; and strives to inherit his beneficence. Under his government, is Ezra, the priest and learned scribe, sent with a large commission from Babylon to Jerusalem, to inquire into the wants, and redress the disorders, of the Jews; with full power, not only to carry with him all the voluntaries of his nation, and the treasures contributed in all the province of Babylon, but to raise such sums, out of the king's revenues, as should be found requisite; and withal, to ordain magistrates and judges, and to crown the laws with due execution, whether to death, or banishment, or confiscation; and lastly, with a large exemption of the priests and Levites, and all the inferior officers of the temple, from all tolls, tributes, customs. Nothing wanted here, whether for direction or encouragement. It is a sign of God's great favor to any nation, when the hearts of sovereign governors are raised up, both to the choice of worthy agents, and to the commanding of pious and restorative actions.

Holy and careful Ezra gathers a new colony of Jews; takes view of them at the river Ahava; and, finding a miss of the sons of Levi (without whom no company, no plantation, can be complete), sends for their supply; and now fully furnished, he proclaims a fast in the way.

I do not hear him say; 'The journey is long and dangerous. The people have need of all their strength. I could well wish us all afflicted with a religious fast, were it not that the abatement of the courage and vigor of the multitude may endanger our success.' But, without all these carnal consultations, he begins with this solemn act of humiliation. It is better, to have God strong in our weakness, than to have flesh and blood strong in His neglect.

Artaxerxes was a patron of the Jews, yet a Pagan by profession. Wise Ezra was afraid of quenching those sparks of piety, which he descried in this semi-proselyte. Rather, therefore, than he will seem to imply a distrust in

the providence of that God, in whose service he went, by seeking a convoy of soldiers from the king, Ezra chooses to put himself on the hazard of the way, and the immediate protection of the Almighty. Any death were better, than to hear Artaxerxes say, 'Is this the man that so confidently told me, 'The hand of our God is on all them for good that seek him; but his power, and his wrath, is against all them that forsake him?' Doth he believe himself, that he thus doubts, ere he begin? Dare he not trust his God with his own businesses?'

The resolutions of faithful hearts are heroical. No heathen man shall stumble at Ezra's fear. He can find more assurance in his fast, than in a Persian band. With a courageous reliance on the hand of his God, he puts himself into the journey; and finds nothing but safety and success. The fidelity of the Almighty never disappointed the confidence of his servants. All the army of Artaxerxes could not have been so strong a guard to the Jews, as their invisible protection.

In the space of four months, is Ezra, and his company, happily arrived at Jerusalem; where he joys to see the new temple and his old colleagues: and now, having delivered up the charge of his treasure by weight in the chambers of the house of the Lord, he applies himself to his work, and delivers the king's commission to the lieutenants and governors, for their utmost assistance.

The princes of Judah do not, for aught I hear, repine at the large patent granted to this priest; nor say, 'What doth a man of this robe meddle with placing or displacing magistrates? with executions of judgments to death, bonds, banishment?' but rather, as congratulating this power to sacred hands, gladly present unto him all their grievances. Truly religious hearts cannot grudge any honor to their spiritual guides.

This holy commissioner is soon welcomed with a sad bill of complaint, from some good peers of Israel; wherein they charge divers of the priests, Levites, people, not to have separated themselves from the idolatrous inhabitants of the lands, nor, therefore, from their abominations, even from Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, and the rest of those

branded nations; that they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with those forbidden people; and (which made the matter so much more heinous, less remediable) that 'the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.'

O hypocritical Jews, did ye refuse to suffer your Samaritan neighbors to join with you in building a liveless house unto God, and do ye now join affinity with a more accursed generation for the building of living houses unto posterity? for the pulling down of the lively house of God?

How could Ezra hear this with his clothes, his hair, his beard, untorn? What grief, what astonishment, must this news needs bring to a zealous heart? And, were it not that the conscience of his sincere respect of God's glory relieved him, how could Ezra choose but repent of his journey; and say, 'Am I come from Babylon, to find paganism in Judah? Did I leave Persians, to meet with Canaanites? What do I here, if Jerusalem be removed? How much better were a clear captivity, than an idolatrous freedom? Wo is me, that, having left many Jewish hearts in Babylon, I now am forced to find heathen blood in Jerusalem!'

As a man distracted with sorrow, Ezra sits down on the earth, with his garments rent, with the hair of his head and beard plucked off, wringing his hands, knocking his breast, not moving from his place until the evening sacrifice. It is hard to be too much affected, with the public sins of God's people. Those, who find themselves in the ship of God's church, cannot but be much troubled, with every dangerous leak that it takes. Common cases are not more neglected by the careless, than taken to heart by the wise and godly.

There, and thus, Ezra sits astonied until the evening sacrifice. Others resorted to him the while, even all that trembled at the words of the God of Israel; but to help on his sorrow, not to relieve; neither doth any man wish a mitigation of his own, or others' grief.

At last, he rises up from his heaviness, and casts himself on his knees, and spreads out his hands unto the Lord his God. Wherefore was all that pensiveness, fasting,

silence, tearing of hair and clothes, but to serve as a meet preface to his prayers? wherein he so freely pours out his heart, as if it had been all dissolved into devotion; professing his shame to lift up his face towards the throne of God; confessing the iniquities of his people, which were increased over their heads, and grown up unto heaven; fetching their trespass far, and charging them deep; feelingly acknowledging the just hand that had followed them, in all their judgments, and the just confusion wherein they now stand before the face of their God.

Tears and sighs and grovellings accompanied his prayers; the example and noise whereof drew Israel into a participation of this public mourning, 'for the people wept very sore.' How can they choose but think, 'If he thus lament for us, how should we grieve for ourselves?'

All Judah went away merrily with their sin, till this check of Ezra: now they are afflicted. Had not the hands of the peers been in this trespass, the people had not been guilty: had not the cheeks of Ezra been first drenched with tears, the people had not been penitent. It cannot be spoken, what power there is in a great example, whether to evil or good.

Prayers and tears are nothing, without endeavors. Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel, puts the first life into this business. Having seconded the complaint of Ezra, he now adds, 'Yet there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them. Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee; we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.'

When mischief is once done, the chief care is, how to redress it. The best way of redress, is, the deliberate undoing of that, which we have rashly committed. The surest obligation to the undoing of an evil act, is, an oath or covenant made with God for the performance.

There is no man so wise, but he may make use of good counsel. There is no man so forward, but he may abide incitation. It is no small encouragement, to see a hearty assistance in an envious and difficult service: 'Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word.'

It is half done, that is thus assured. There was need of a strong power to dissolve a matrimonial, though inordinate love. Doubtless, these men had married out of affection. Their hearts were no less set on these wives, though heathenish, than if they had been of their own tribes; neither were their children, thus begotten, less dear unto them, than if they had lain in Jewish wombs. Nothing less than an oath of God therefore could quit these passions: that is, both required and taken.

Now begins Ezra to conceive some hope of present redress; the comfort whereof, yet, cannot turn off his sorrow for the offence passed: he neither eats bread, nor drinks water; willingly punishing himself, because Israel had sinned. Now shall his countrymen easily read in his face their own penance and just humiliation; and say, 'This man takes no joy in our sufferings; he would not smart thus for us, if he did not descry more danger towards us, than we can apprehend.'

Proclamation is made through Judah and Jerusalem, under pain of forfeiture of substance and excommunication from God's people, that all the children of the captivity should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem. They are met accordingly.

The courts of God's house are thronged with penitents; and now, as if the heaven would teach them what to do, the clouds rain down abundance of tears. What with those sad showers, what with their inward remorse, the people sit trembling in the open courts; and humbly wait for the reproof, for the sentence, of Ezra. He rises up, and, with a severe countenance, lays before them their sin, their amends: the sin of their strange wives; the amends of their confession, of their separation: not sparing to search their wound; not neglecting the meet plaster for their cure. The people, as willing to be healed, yield themselves patiently to that rough hand, not shrinking at the pain, or favoring the sore; 'As thou hast said, so must we do;' only craving a fit proportion of time, and a due assistance for the dispatch of so long and important a work.

Ezra gladly hearkens to this, not so much request, as counsel of Israel. The charge is divided to men, and days. For two months' space, the commissioners sit

close; and within that compass, finish this business, not more thankless than necessary.

Doubtless, much variety of passion met with them, in this busy service. Here, you should have seen an affectionate husband bitterly weeping at the dismission of a loving wife, and drowning his last farewell in sobs: there, you might have seen a passionate wife, hanging on the arms of her beloved husband; and, on her knees, conjuring him, by his former vows and the dear pledges of their loves; and proffering with many tears, to redeem the loss of her husband, with the change of her religion. Here, you might have seen the kindred and parents of the dismissed, shutting up their denied suits with rage and threats: there, the abandoned children kneeling to their seemingly-cruel father, beseeching him not to cast off the fruit of his own loins; and expostulating, what they have offended in being his. The resolved Israelites must be deaf or blind to these moving objects; and so far forget nature, as to put off part of themselves. Personal inconveniences have reason to yield to public mischiefs. Long entertainment makes that sin hard to be ejected, whose first motions might have been repelled with ease.

Had not the prohibition of these marriages been express, and their danger and mischief palpable, the care of their separation had not bred so much tumult in Israel. He, that ordained matrimony, had, on fearful curses, forbidden an unequal yoke with infidels. Besides the marring of the church by the mixture of an unholy seed; religion suffered for the present, and all good hearts with it. Many tears, many sacrifices, need to expiate so foul an offence, and to set Israel straight again.

All this while, even these mesline Jews were yet forward to build the temple. The worst sinners may yield an outward conformity to actions of piety. Ezra hath done more service in pulling down, than the Jews in building: without this act, the temple might have stood, religion must needs have fallen; Babel had been translated to Jerusalem, Jews had turned Gentiles. Oh happy endeavors of devout and holy Ezra, that hath at once restored Judah to God, and to itself!—Ezra.

NEHEMIAH BUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

THIRTEEN years were now passed, since Ezra's going up to Jerusalem; when Nehemiah, the religious courtier of Artaxerxes, inquires of the estate of his country, and brethren of Judea.

He might well find that holy scribe had not been idle. The commission of Artaxerxes had been improved by him to the utmost. Disorders were reformed, but the walls lay waste: the temple was built, but the city was ruinous; and if some streets were repaired, yet they stood unguarded; open to the mercy of an enemy, to the infestation of ill neighborhood. Great bodies must have slow motions: as Jerusalem, so the church of God, whose type it was, must be finished by leisure.

Nehemiah sate warm in the court at Shushan, favored by the great king Artaxerxes. Nothing could be wanting to him, whether for pleasure or state. What needed he to trouble his head, with thoughts for Jerusalem? What if those remote walls lay on heaps, while himself dwelt fair? What if his far-distant countrymen be despised, while himself is honored by the great monarch of the world? It is not so easy, for gracious dispositions to turn off the public calamities of God's church: neither can they do other, than lose their private felicities, in the common distresses of the universal body. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.'

Many Jews went up from Babylon and Shushan, to Jerusalem; few ever returned voluntarily from their native home, to the region of their captivity. Some occasion drew Hanani, with certain others of Judah, to this voyage. Of them doth Nehemiah carefully inquire the present condition of Jerusalem. It was no news, that the people were afflicted and reproached, the walls broken down, the gates burnt with fire. Even since the furious devastation of Nebuzaradan, that city knew not better terms. Seldom when doth the spiritual Jerusalem fare otherwise, in respect of outward estate? External glory, and magnificence, is an unsure note of the church.

Well had Nehemiah hoped, that the gracious edict and beneficence of Darius, and the successive patronage of his lord Artaxerxes, had, by the continuance of twenty years' favor, advanced the strength and glory of Jerusalem; but now, finding the holy city to lie still in the dust of her confusion, neglected of God, despised of men, he sits down and weeps, and mourns, and fasts, and prays to the God of heaven. How many saw those ruins, and were little affected! He hears of them afar off, and is thus passionate. How many were on this sight affected with a fruitless sorrow! His mourning is joined with the endeavors of redress. In vain is that grief, which hath no other end than itself.

Nehemiah is resolved to kneel to the king his master, for the repair of his Jerusalem. He dares not attempt the suit, till he have begun with God. This good courtier knew well, that the hearts of these earthly kings are in the overruling hand of the King of heaven, to incline whither he pleaseth. Our prayers are the only true means to make way for our success. If, in all our occasions, we do not begin with the First Mover, the course is preposterous, and commonly speeds thereafter.

Who dares censure the piety of courtiers, when he finds Nehemiah standing before Artaxerxes? Even the Persian palace is not uncapable of a saint. No man, that waits on the altar at Jerusalem, can compare for zeal with him, that waits on the cup of a pagan monarch. The mercies of God are unlimited to places, to callings.

Thus armed with devotions, doth Nehemiah put himself into the presence of his master Artaxerxes. His face was overclouded with a deep sadness; neither was he willing to clear it. The king easily notes the disparity of the countenance of the bearer, and the wine that he bears; and, in a gracious familiarity, asks the reason of such unwonted change. How well it becomes the great, to stoop unto a courteous affability; and to exchange words of respect, even with their humble vassals!

Nehemiah had not been so long in the court, but he knew that princes like no other, than cheerful attendants; neither was he wont to bring any other face into that presence, than smooth and smiling.

Greatness uses to be full of suspicion; and, where it sees a dejection and sourness of the brows, is ready to apprehend some sullen thoughts of discontentment; or, at the least, construes it for a disrespect to that sovereignty, whose beams should be of power to disperse all our inward mists.

Even good manners forbid a man to press into the presence of a prince, except he can either lay by these unpleasing passions, or hide them. So had Nehemiah hitherto done: now, he purposely suffers his sorrow to look through his eyes, that it may work both inquiry and compassion from his master: neither doth he fail of his hopes in either; 'Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?' How sensible do we think the Father of mercies is of all our pensive thoughts, when a heathen master is so tender of a servant's grief! How ready should our tongues be, to lay open our cares to the God of all comfort, when we see Nehemiah so quick, in the expressions of his sorrow to an uncertain ear!

'Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof burnt with fire?' Not without an humble preface, doth Nehemiah lay forth his grievance. Complaints have ever an unpleasing harshness in them; which must be taken off, by some discreet insinuation: although it could not but sound well in the generous ear of Artaxerxes, that his servant was so careful for the honor of his country. As nature hath made us all members of a community, and hath given us common interests, so, it is most pleasing to us, to see these public cares divide us from our own.

The king easily descries a secret supplication wrapt up in this moanful answer, which the modest suitor was afraid to disclose; and therefore he helps that bashful motion into the light; 'For what dost thou make request?' It is the praise of bounty, to draw on the just petitions of fearful suppliants.

Nehemiah dares not open his mouth to the king, till his heart hath opened itself, by a sudden ejaculation, to his God. No business can be so hasty, but our prayer may prevent it; the wings whereof are so nimble, that it can fly up to heaven, and solicit God, and bring down an an-

swer, before ever our words need to come forth of our lips. In vain shall we hope that any design of ours can prosper, if we have not first sent this messenger on our errand.

After this silent and insensible preparation, Nehemiah moves his suit to the king: yet not at once, but by meet degrees. First, he craves leave for his journey, and for building: then, he craves aid for both. Both are granted. Nehemiah departs; furnished with letters to the governors, for a convoy; with letters to the keeper of the king's forest, for timber: not more full of desire, than hope.

Who ever put his hand to any great work, for the behoof of God's church, without opposition? As the walls of the temple found busy enemies, so shall the walls of the city; and these so much more, as they promise more security and strength to Jerusalem. Sanballat the deputy-lieutenant of the Moabites, and Tobiah the like officer to the Ammonites, and Geshem to the Arabians, are galled with envy, at the arrival of a man authorised to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. There cannot be a greater vexation to wicked hearts, than to see the spiritual Jerusalem in any likelihood of prosperity. Evil spirits and men need no other torment, than their own despite.

This wise courtier hath learnt, that secresy is the surest way of any important dispatch. His errand could not but be known to the governors: their furtherance was enjoined, for the provision of materials; else the walls of Jerusalem had overlooked the first notice of their heathen neighbors. Without any noise, doth Nehemiah arise, in the dead of night; and, taking some few into his company, none into his counsel, he secretly rounds the decayed walls of Jerusalem, and views the breaches, and observes the gates, and returns home in silence, joying in himself to foresee these reparations, which none of the inhabitants did once dream of: at last, when he had fully digested this great work in his own breast, he calls the rulers and citizens together; and, having condoled with them the common distress and reproach, he tells them of the hand of his God, which was good on him; he shows them the gracious commission of the king his master, for

that good work. They answer him, with a zealous encouragement of each other, 'Let us rise up and build.'

Such a hearty invitation, countenanced by authority, hath easily strengthened the hands of the multitude. With what observance and dearness, do they now look on their unexpected patron! How do they honor him, as a man sent from heaven, for the welfare of Jerusalem! Every man flies to his hod and trowel; and rejoices to second so noble a leader, in laying a stone in that wall of their common defence.

Those emulous neighbors of theirs, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, the chief commanders of Moab, Ammon, Arabia, have soon espied the first mortar, that is laid on that old foundation. Envy is usually more quick-sighted than love. And now, they scornfully apply themselves to these despised Jews, and think to scoff them out of their work. The favorablest persecution of any good cause, is, the lash of lewd tongues, whether by bitter taunts or by scurrilous invectives; which it is as impossible to avoid, as necessary to contemn.

The barking of these dogs doth not hinder Nehemiah from walking on his way. Professing his confidence in the God of heaven, whose work that was, he shakes off their impotent malice, and goes on cheerfully to build.

Every Israelite knows his station. Eliashib the high-priest, and the rest of that sacred tribe, put the first hand to this work. They build the sheep-gate, and sanctify it; and in it, all the rest. As the first fruits of the field, so the first stones of the wall, are hallowed to God, by the consecration of those devout agents. That business is like to prosper, which begins with God.

No man was idle; no part was intermitted. All Jerusalem was, at once, encompassed with busy laborers. It cannot be, but the joint endeavors of faithful hearts must raise the walls of the church.

Now Sanballat and his brethren find some matter to spend their scoffs on; 'What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burnt?'

How basely do carnal minds think of the projects and actions of God's children! therefore vilifying them, because they measure them by no other line, than outward probability. O foolish Moabites, this work is God's; and therefore, in despite of all your tongues and hands, it shall prosper. He hears you, whom ye have blasphemed; and shall turn your reproach on your own heads. And thou, proud Ammonite, that couldst say, 'If a fox go upon their stone-wall, he shall break it down,' shalt well find, that all the wolvish troops of your confederates shall not be able to remove one stone of this sure fortification. While Moab and Ammon repine and bluster in vain, this wall shall rise; and when Moab and Ammon shall lie in the dust, this wall shall stand. The mortar, that hath been tempered with so many prayers, cannot but outlast all the flints and marbles of human confidence.

Now, the growth of this wall hath turned the mirth of the adversaries into rage. These Moabites, Ammonites, Arabians, Ashdadites, conspire all together, to fight against Jerusalem; and, while the mortar is yet green, to demolish those envied heaps.

What hath this city offended, in desiring to be defenced? What wrong could it be, to wish a freedom from wrongs? Were this people so mighty, that there could be danger in overpowering their neighbors, or in resisting a common sovereign, there might have appeared some color for this hostile opposition; but, alas! what could a despised handfull do to the prejudice of either? It is quarrel enough to Jerusalem, that it would not be miserable.

Neither is it otherwise with the head of these hellish complices. There needs no other cause of his utmost fury, than to see a poor soul struggling to get out of the reach of his tyranny. So do savage beasts bristle up themselves, and make the most fierce assaults, when they are in danger of losing the prey, which they once seized on.

In the mean while, what doth Nehemiah, with his Jews, for their common safety? They pray, and watch; they pray unto God; they watch against the enemy. Thus, thus shall we happily prevail against those spiritual wickednesses, which war against our souls. No evil can surprise us, if we watch; no evil can hurt us, if we pray;

'This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.'

There was need of a continued vigilancy. The enemy was not more malicious, than subtle, and had said; 'They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst amongst them, and slay them.' Open force is not so dangerous, as close dissimulation. They meant to seem Jews, while they were Moabites and Ammonites; and, in the clothes of brethren, purposed to hide murderers. Never is Satan so prevalent, as when he comes transformed into an angel of light.

It was a merciful providence of God, that made these men's tongues the blabs of their own counsel. Many a fearful design had prospered, if wickedness could have been silent. Warning is a lawful guard to a wise adversary. Now doth Nehemiah arm his people; and, for the time, changes their trowels into swords, and spears, and bows; raising up their courage with a vehement exhortation, to 'remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and to fight for their brethren, their sons, their daughters, their wives, and their houses.' Nothing can so hearten us to the encountering of any evil, as the remembrance of that infinite power and wisdom, which can either avert, or mitigate, or sanctify it. We could not faint, if we did not forget God.

Necessity urges a man to fight for himself; love enables his hand to fight for those, which challenge a part in him. Where love meets with necessity, there can want no endeavor of victory. Necessity can make even cowards, valiant; love make the valiant, unresistible: Nehemiah doth not, therefore, persuade these Jews to fight for themselves, but for theirs. The judgment of the interest and danger cannot but quicken the dullest spirits.

Discovered counsels are already prevented. These serpents die, by being first seen; 'When the enemies heard that it was known unto us,' they let fall their plot. Could we descry the enterprises of Satan, that tempter would return ashamed.

It is a safe point of wisdom, to carry a jealous eye over those whom we have once found hollow and hostile. From that time forth, Nehemiah divided the task, be-

twixt the trowel and the sword; so disposing of every Israelite, that, while one hand was a mason, the other was a soldier: one is for work; the other, for defence.

Oh lively image of the church militant, wherein every one labors weaponed; wherein there is neither an idle soldier, nor a secure workman! Every one so builds, as that he is ready to ward temptations: every one so wields the sword of the Spirit, for defence, that withal he builds up himself in his most holy faith. Here is neither a fruitless valor, nor an unsafe diligence.

But what can our weapons avail us, if there be not means to warn us of an enemy? Without a trumpet, we are armed in vain: 'The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.' Yea, so far as the utmost bounds of the earth, are we separated one from another, on the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem: only the sacred trumpets of God call us, who are distant in place, to a combination in profession.

And who are those trumpets, but the public messengers of God, of whom God hath said; 'If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand?' Wo be to us, if we sound not; if the sound we give be uncertain! Wo be to our people, if when we premonish them of enemies, of judgments, they sit still unmoved; not buckling themselves to a resistance, to a prevention!

It is a mutual aid, to which these trumpets invite us; we might fight apart, without the signals of war; 'In what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us.' There can be no safety to the church, but where every man thinks his life, and welfare, consists in his fellows. Conjoined forces may prosper; single oppositions are desperate. All hearts and hands must meet in the common quarrel. Nehemiah i. ii. iii. iv.

NEHEMIAH REDRESSING THE EXTORTION OF THE JEWS.

With what difficulty do these miserable Jews settle in their Jerusalem! The fear of foreign enemies doth not more afflict them, than the extortion of their own. Dearth

is added unto war. Miseries do not stay for a mannerly succession to each other, but in a rude importunity throng in at once. Babel may be built with ease; but whosoever goes about to raise the walls of God's city, shall have his hands full. The incursion of public enemies may be prevented, with vigilancy and power; but there is no defence against the secret gripes of oppression.

There is no remedy. The Jews are so taken up with their trowel and sword, for the time, that they cannot attend their trades; so as, while the wall did rise, their estates must needs impair. Even in the cheapest season, they must needs be poor, that earned nothing but the public safety: how much more in a common scarcity! Their houses, lands, vineyards, are therefore mortgaged; yea their very skins are sold for corn, to their brethren. Necessity forces them to sell that, which it was cruelty to buy. What will we not, what must we not, part with for life?

The covetous rulers did not consider the occasions of this want, but the advantage. Sometimes, a bargain may be as unmerciful, as a robbery. Charity must be the rule of all contracts; the violation whereof, whether in the matter or the price, cannot but be sinful.

There could not be a juster ground of expostulation, than this of the oppressed Jews; ''Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters.' While there is no difference in nature, why should there be such an injurious disproportion in condition?'

Even the same flesh may bear a just inequality: some may be rulers, while others are subject; some wealthy, others poor; but why those wealthy rulers should tyrannize over those poor inferiors, and turn brotherhood into bondage, no reason can be given, but lawless ambition. If there were one flesh of peers, another of peasants, there should be some color for the proud impositions of the great; as, because the flesh of beasts is in a lower rank than ours, we kill, we devour it, at pleasure: but now, since the large body of mankind consists of the same flesh, why should the hand strike the foot?

And if one flesh may challenge meet respects from us, how much more one spirit! The spirit is more noble

than the flesh is base. The flesh is dead without the spirit; the spirit, without the flesh, active and immortal. Our soul, though shapeless and immaterial, is more apparently one, than the flesh. And if the unity of our human spirit call us to a mutual care and tenderness in our carriage each to other, how much more of the divine! By that, we are men; by this, we are Christians. As the soul animates us to a natural life, so doth God's Spirit animate the soul to a heavenly; which is so one, that it cannot be divided. How should that one Spirit cause us so far to forget all natural and civil differences, as not to contemn, not to oppress any, whom it informeth!

They are not Christians, not men, that can enjoy the miseries of their brethren, whether in the flesh or spirit.

Good Nehemiah cannot choose but be much moved, at the barbarous extortion of the people; and now, like an impartial governor, he rebukes the rulers and nobles, whose hand was thus bloody with oppression. As of fishes, so of men, the lesser are a prey to the great. It is an ill use made of power, when the weight of it serves only to crush the weak. There were no living amongst men, had not God ordained higher than the highest; and yet higher than they. Eminency of place cannot be better improved, than by taking down mighty offenders. If nobility do embase itself to any foul sin, it is so much more worthy of coercion, by how much the person is of greater mark.

The justice of this reproof could not but shame impudence itself; "We, after our ability, have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold to the heathen; and will you sell your brethren? or shall they be sold to us?' Shall they find at home that yoke of bondage, which they had put off abroad? While they are still Jews, shall we turn Assyrians? If they must be slaves, why not rather to enemies, than to brethren? How much more tolerable were a foreign servitude, than a domestical! Be ashamed, O ye nobles of Israel, to renew Babylon in Jerusalem.' I marvel not, if the offenders be stricken dumb, with so unanswerable an expostulation. Guiltiness and confusion have stopped their mouths.

Many of those who have not had grace enough to re-

frain sin, yet are not so utterly void of grace, as to maintain sin. Our after-wits are able to discern a kind of unreasonableness in those wicked actions, which the first appearance represents unto us plausible. Gain leads in sin; but shame follows it out.

There are those, that are bold and witty, to bear out commodious or pleasant evils. Neither could these Jewish enormities have wanted some colors of defence. Their stock was their own; which might have been otherwise improved, to no less profit. The offer, the suit, of these bargains was from the sellers: these escheats fell into their hands, unsought; neither did their contract cause the need of their brethren, but relieve it. But their conscience will not bear this plea. I know not whether the maintenance of the least evil be not worse, than the commission of the greatest: this may be of frailty; that argues obstinacy. There is hope of that man, that can blush and be silent.

After the conviction of the fact, it is seasonable for Nehemiah, to persuade reformation. No oratory is so powerful, as that of mildness; especially when we have to do with those, who, either through stomach or greatness, may not endure a rough reproof. The drops, that fall easily on the corn, ripen and fill the ear; but the stormy showers, that fall with violence, beat down the stalks flat to the earth, and lay whole fields, without hope of recovery.

Who can resist this sweet and sovereign reprehension; ‘‘Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen, our enemies?’ Did we dwell alone in the midst of the earth, yet the fear of God should overawe our ways; but now that we dwell in the midst of our enemies, whose eyes are bent on all our actions, whose tongues are as ready to blaspheme God as we to offend him, how carefully should we avoid those sins, which may draw shame on our profession! Now the scandal is worse than the fact. Thus shall religion suffer more from the heathen, than our brethren do from us. If justice, if charity, cannot sway with us, yet let the scornful insultations of the profane Gentiles affright us from these pressures.’

No ingenuous disposition can be so tender of his own disgrace, as the true Israelite is of the reproach of his God. What is it, that he will not rather refrain, do, suffer, than that glorious name shall hazard a blemish? They cannot want outward retentives from sin, that live either among friends or enemies: if friends, they may not be grieved; if enemies, they may not be provoked. Those, that would live well, must stand in awe of all eyes. Even those, that are without the church, yet may not be without regard. No person can be so contemptible, as that his censure should be contemned.

In dissuading from sin, reason itself cannot prevail more than example: "I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn.' But from the time that I was appointed to the charge of Judah, 'I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.'" He shall never rule well, that doth all that he may. It is not safe for either part, that a prince should live at the height of his power; and if the greatest abate of their right, is it for inferiors to exort?

Had Nehemiah aimed at his own greatness, no man could have had fairer pretences for his gain: 'The former governors that were before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.' His foot had not first trod in this commodious path: it was beaten by the steps of his predecessors; neither did any of them walk besides it. However it might be envious to raise new taxations, yet to continue those he found unrepined at, had been out of the reach of exception.

A good governor looks not so much what hath been done, as what should be. Precedents are not the rule whereby he rules, but justice, but piety: 'So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.' Laws are not a straiter curb to subjects, than conscience is to good princes. They dare not do, what they cannot do charitably. What advantage can they think it, to be from under the controlment of men, when the God of heaven notes and punishes their offences? Whoso walketh by this rule, can neither err, nor miscarry.

It is no trusting to the external remedies of sin: either

they are not always present, or, if present, not powerful enough; but if the fear of God have once taken up the heart, it goes ever with us, and is strong enough to overmaster the forciblest temptation.

Therefore, must these Jews follow this example of Nehemiah, because he followed not the example of his predecessors: because he left their evil, they must imitate his good. In vain shall rulers advise against their own practice: when they lead the way, they may well challenge to be followed. Seldom hath it been ever seen, that great persons have not been seconded in evil. Why should not their power serve, to make patterns of their virtues?

Thus well did it speed with Nehemiah. His merciful carriage and zealous suit have drawn the rulers to a promise of restitution; 'We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest.'

It is no small advantage, that these nobles must forego, in their releases. There cannot be a better sign of a sound amendment, than that we can be content to be losers by our repentance. Many formal penitents have yielded to part with so much of their sin, as may abate nothing of their profit; as if these rulers should have been willing to restore the persons, but withal should have stood stiffly to require their sums. This whining and partial satisfaction had been thankless. True remorse enlargeth the heart, and openeth the hand to a bountiful redemption of our errors.

Good purposes do too often cool in time, and vanish into a careless forgetfulness. Nehemiah feared this issue of these holy resolutions; and therefore he prosecutes them in their first heat: not leaving these promises, till he had secured them with an oath. The priests are called for; that, in their mouths, the adjuration may be more solemn and sacred. It is the best point of wisdom, to take the first opportunity of fixing good motions, which otherwise are, of themselves, light and slighty. To make all yet more sure, their oaths are cross-barred with his execration: 'Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that

performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out, and emptied: and all the congregation said, Amen.' A promise, an oath, a curse, are passed on this act: now, no Israelite dares falter in the execution. When we have a sin in chase, it is good to follow it home; not slackening our pursuit, till we have fully prevailed; and when it is once fallen under our hands, we cannot kill it too much.

Now Nehemiah, having thus happily delivered his people from a domestical captivity, commends his service to the gracious remuneration of the Almighty; 'Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.' Therefore, doth he refuse the bread of the governor, that he may receive the reward of the Governor of Heaven! Had he taken a temporary recompense, both he and it had been forgotten: now, he hath made a happy change for eternity. Not that he pleads his merit, but sues for mercy: neither doth he pray to be remembered for his work, but according to his work.

Our good deeds, as they are well accepted of God, so they shall not go unrewarded; and what God will give, why may not we crave? Doubtless, as we may offer up our honest obediences unto God, so we may expect and beg his promised retributions: not out of a proud conceit of the worth of our earnings, who, at the best, are no other than unprofitable servants, but out of a faithful dependance on his pact of bounty, who cannot be less than his word. O God, if we do aught that is good, it is thine act, and not ours: crown thine own work in us, and take thou the glory of thine own mercies.

While Nehemiah is busy in the reforming abuses, at home; the enemy is plotting against him, abroad. Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, conspire against his life; and, in him, against the peace of Jerusalem.

What open hostility could not do, they hope to effect by pretence of treaties. Four several messages call Nehemiah to a friendly meeting. Distrust is a sure guard. The wise governor hath learned to suspect the hollow favors of an enemy, and to return them with safe and just excuses: 'I cannot come down; why should the work

cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?' I do not hear him say, 'You intend mischief to me; I will not come forth to you;' though this were the proper cause of his forbearance; but he turns them off with an answer, that had as much truth, as reservedness. Fraud is the fitliest answered with subtlety. Even innocency is allowed a lawful craft. That man is in an ill case, that conceals no truth from an adversary.

What entreaties cannot do, shall be attempted by threats. Sanballat's servant comes now, the fifth time, with an opened letter, importing dangerous intimations, wherein is written, 'It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king.'

'It is reported:' and what falsehood may not plead this warrant? What can be more lying than report? 'Among the heathen:' and who is more ethnic, than Sanballat? What Pagan can be worse, than a mongrel idolater? 'And Gashmu saith it:' 'Ask my fellow else.' This Arabian was one of those three heads of all the hostile combination, against Jerusalem, against Nehemiah. It would be wide with innocence, if enemies might be allowed to accuse. 'That the Jews think to rebel:' a stale suggestion, but once powerful. Malice hath learned to miscall all actions. Where the hands cannot be taxed, very thoughts are prejudged: 'For which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king.'

He was never true Israelite, that hath not passed spiteful slanders and misconstructions. Artaxerxes knew his servant too well, to believe any rumor, that should have been so shameless. The ambition of Nehemiah was well known, to reach only to the cup, not to the sceptre, of his sovereign. And yet, to make up a sound tale, 'Prophets are suborned to preach, There is a king in Judah:' as if that loyal governor had corrupted the pulpits also; and had taught them the language of treason.

But what of all this? What if some false tongue have whispered such idle tales? It is not safe for thee, O Nehemiah, to contemn report. Perhaps, this news shall fly to the court, and work thee a deadly displeasure, ere

thou canst know thyself traduced. Come therefore, and let us take counsel together. Surely that man cannot be sparing of any thing, that is prodigal of his reputation. If aught under heaven can fetch Nehemiah out of his hold, it is the care of his fame. But that wary governor sees a net spread near unto this stall; and therefore keeps aloof, not without contempt of those sly devices: 'There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.' Some imputations are best answered with a neglective denial. It falls out often, that plain dealing puts craft out of countenance.

Since neither force nor fraud can kill Nehemiah, they will now try to draw him into a sin, and thereby into a reproach. O God, that any prophet's tongue should be mercenary! Shemaiah the seer is hired by Tobiah and Sanballat, to affright the governor, with the noise of his intended murder; and to advise him for shelter, to fly to the forbidden refuge of the temple. The color was fair: 'Violence is meant to thy person. No place but one can promise thee safety: the city hath as yet no gates: come therefore, and shut thyself up in the temple; there only shalt thou be free from all assaults.'

And what if Nehemiah had hearkened to this counsel? Sin and shame had followed. That holy place was for none but persons sacred; such as were privileged by blood and function: others should presume and offend in entering. And now, what would the people say? 'What shall become of us, while our governor hides his head for fear? Where shall we find a temple to secure us? What do we depending on a cowardly leader?'

Well did Nehemiah forecast these circumstances, both of act and event; and therefore, resolving to distrust a prophet that persuaded him to the violation of a law, he rejects the motion with scorn; 'Should such a man as I flee? Should I go into the temple to save my life? I will not go.' It is fit for great persons to stand on the honor of their places. Their very stations should put those spirits into them, that should make them hate to stoop unto base conditions.

Had God sent this message, we know he hath power to dispense with his own laws; but well might the contra-

diction of a law argue the message not sent of God. God, as he is one, so doth he perfectly agree with himself. If any private spirit cross a written word, let him be accursed. —Nehemiah v, vi.

AHASUERUS FEASTING; VASHTI CAST OFF; ESTHER CHOSEN.

What bounds can be set to human ambition? Ahasuerus, that is, Xerxes the son of Darius, is already the king of a hundred and seven and twenty provinces, and now is ready to fight for more. He hath newly subdued Egypt, and is now addressing himself for the conquest of Greece. He cannot hope ever to see all the land that he possesseth, and yet he cannot be quiet, while he hears of more. Less than two ells of earth shall ere long serve him, whom, for the time, a whole world shall scarce satisfy. In vain shall a man strive to have that, which he cannot enjoy; and to enjoy aught, by mere relation. It is a windy happiness, that is sought in the exaggeration of those titles, which are taken on others' credit, without the sense of the owner. Nothing can fill the heart of man, but He that made it.

This great monarch, partly in triumph of the great victories that he hath lately won in Egypt, and partly for the animation of his princes and soldiers to his future exploits, makes a feast, like himself, royal and magnificent. What is greatness, if it be not showed? And wherein can greatness be better shown, than in the achievements of war, and the entertainment of peace?

All other feasts were but hunger, to this of Ahasuerus; whether we regard the number of guests, or the largeness of preparation, or continuance of time. During the space of a whole half-year, all the tables were sumptuously furnished, for all comers from India to Ethiopia; a world of meat; every meal was so set on, as if it should have been the last. Yet all this long feast hath an end; and all this glory is shut up in forgetfulness. What is Ahasuerus the better, that his peers then said, he was incomparably great? What are his peers the better, that they were feasted? Happy is he, that eats bread and drinks new

wine in the kingdom of God. This banquet is for eternity; without intermission, without satiety.

What variety of habits, of languages, of manners, met at the boards of Ahasuerus! What confluence of strange guests was there now to Shushan! And, lest the glory of this great king might seem, like some coarse picture, only fair afar off, after the princes and nobles of the remote provinces, all the people of Shushan are entertained, for seven days, with equal pomp and state. The spacious court of the palace is turned into a royal hall: the walls are of rich hangings, the pillars of marble, the beds of silver and gold, the pavement of porphyry curiously chequered. The wine and the vessels strove whether should be the richer: no men drunk in worse than gold; and while the metal was the same, the form of each cup was diverse. The attendance was answerable to the cheer, and the freedom matched both: here was no compulsion, either to the measure or quality of the draught; every man's rule was his own choice. Who can but blush, to see forced healths in Christian banquets, when the civility of very pagans commands liberty?

I cannot but envy the modesty of heathen dames. Vashti the queen, and her ladies, with all the several ranks of that sex, feast apart; entertaining each other, with a bashful courtesy, without wantonness, without that wild scurrility, which useth to haunt promiscuous meetings. Oh shameful unchastity of those loose Christians, who must feed their lusts, while they fill their bellies; and think the fast unperfect, where they may not satiate their eye, no less than palate!

The last day of this pompous feast is now come. King Ahasuerus is so much more cheerful, by how much his guests are near to their dismission. Every one is wont to close up his courtesy with so much more passion, as the last acts use to make the deeper impression. And now, that he might at once amaze and endear the beholders, Vashti the queen, in all her royalty, is called for. Her sight shall shut up the feast; that the princes and the people may say, 'How happy is king Ahasuerus, not so much in this greatness, as in that beauty!'

Seven officers of the chamber are sent, to carry the

message, to attend her entrance; and are returned with a denial. Perhaps Vashti thought; 'What means this uncouth motion? More than six months hath this feast continued, and all this while we have enjoyed the wonted liberty of our sex. Were the king still himself, this command could not be sent. It is the wine, and not he, that is guilty of this errand. Is it for me to humor him, in so vain a desire? Will it agree with our modest reservedness, to offer ourselves to be gazed at by millions of eyes? Who knows, what wanton attempts may follow on this ungoverned excess? This very message argues, that wit and reason have yielded their places to that besotting liquor. Nothing but absence can secure us from some unbeseeming proffer. Neither doubt I, but the king, when he returns to himself, will give me thanks for so wise a forbearance.'

Thus, on the conceit, as is likely, that her presence would be either needless or unsafe, Vashti refuseth to come: although, perhaps, her great spirits thought much, to receive a command from the hand of officers.

The blood, that is once inflamed with wine, is apt to boil with rage. Ahasuerus is very wroth with this indign repulse. It was the ostentation of his glory and might, that he affected, before these princes, peers, people; and now that seems eclipsed, in the shutting up of all his magnificence, with the disgraceful affront of a woman. It vexes him to think, that those nobles, whom he meant to send away astonished with the admiration of his power and majesty, should now say; 'What boots it Ahasuerus to rule afar off, when he cannot command at home? In vain doth he boast to govern kings, while he is checked by a woman.'

Whatever were the intentions of Vashti, surely her disobedience was inexcusable. It is not for a good wife to judge of her husband's will, but to execute it. Neither wit, nor stomach, may carry her into a curious inquisition into the reasons of an enjoined charge; much less to a resistance: but in a hoodwinked simplicity she must follow, whither she is led; as one that holds her chief praise to consist in subjection.

Where should the perfection of wisdom dwell, if not in

the courts of great princes? Or what can the treasures of monarchs purchase more invaluably precious, than learned and judicious attendance? Or who can be so fit for honor, as the wisest? I doubt how Ahasuerus could have been so great, if his throne had not been still compassed with them, that knew the times, and understood the law and judgment. These were his oracles in all his doubts. These are now consulted in this difficulty. Neither must their advice be secretly whispered in the king's ear; but publicly delivered in the audience of all the princes.

It is a perilous way, that these sages are called to go, betwixt a husband and wife; especially of such power and eminency; yet Memucan fears not to pass a heavy sentence against queen Vashti: 'Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and all the people, that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus:' a deep and sore crimination. Injuries are so much more intolerable, as they are dilated unto more. Those offences, which are of narrow extent, may receive an easy satisfaction: the amends are not possible, where the wrong is universal: 'For this deed of the queen shall come abroad to all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes.' Indeed so public a fact must needs fly: that concourse gave fit opportunity, to diffuse it all the world over. The examples of the great are easily drawn into rules. Bad lessons are apt to be taken out. As honor, so contempt, falls down from the head to the skirts; never ascends from the skirts to the head.

These wise men are so much the more sensible of this danger, as they saw it more likely the case might prove their own: 'Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes.' The first precedents of evil must be carefully avoided, if we care to keep a constant order in good. Prudence cannot better bestir itself, than in keeping mischief from home.

The foundation of this doom of Memucan is not laid so deep for nothing; 'If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of Persians and Medians, that it be not

altered, That Vashti come no more before Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another, that is better than she.'

How bold a word was this; and how hazardous! Had Ahasuerus more loved the beauty of Vashti, than his honor, Memucan had spoken against his own life. Howsoever, a queen of so great spirits could not want strength of favor and faction, in the Persian court; which could not but take fire at so desperate a motion. Faithful statesmen, overlooking private respects, must bend their eyes on public dangers; laboring to prevent a common mischief, though with the adventure of their own.

Nature had taught these pagans the necessity of a female subjection, and the hate and scorn of a proud disobedience. They have unlearned the very dictates of nature, that can abide the head to be set below the rib.

I cannot say but Vashti was worthy of a sharp censure: I cannot say she was worthy a repudiation. This plaster drew too hard. It was but heathen justice, to punish the wife's disobedience in one indifferent act, with a divorce. Nothing, but the violation of the marriage-bed, can either break or untie the knot of marriage.

Had she not been a queen, had not that contemptuous act been public, the sentence had not been so hard: now, the punishment must be exemplary, lest the sin should be so. Many a one had smarted less, if their persons, if their place had been meaner.

The king, the princes, approve this heavy judgment of Memucan. It is not in the power of the fair face of Vashti, to warrant her stomach. No doubt, many messages passed, ere the rigor of this execution. That great heart knows not to relent; but will rather break, than yield to an humble deprecation. When the stone and the steel meet, fire is stricken: it is a soft answer, that appeaseth wrath. Vashti is cast off. Letters are sent from the king into all his provinces, to command that every man should rule at home. The court affords them an awful pattern of authority. Had not Ahasuerus doted much on Vashti's beauty, he had not called her forth at the feast, to be wondered at, by his peers and people; yet now he so feels the wound of his reputation,

that he forgets he ever felt any wound of his affection. Even the greatest love may be overstrained. It is not safe presuming on the deepest assurances of dearness. There is no heart, that may not be estranged.

It is not possible, that great princes should want soothing up, in all their inclinations, in all their actions. While Ahasuerus is following the chase of his ambition in the wars of Greece, his followers are providing for his lust at home. Nothing could sound more pleasing to a carnal ear, than that all the fair young virgins, throughout all his dominions, should be gathered into his palace at Shushan, for his assay and choice. The decree is soon published. The charge is committed to Hegai, the king's chamberlain, both of their purification and ornaments.

What strife, what emulation, was now amongst all the Persian damsels, that either were or thought themselves fair! Every one hopes to be a queen; and sees no reason, why any other should be thought more excellent. How happy were we, if we could be so ambitious of our espousals to the King of Heaven!

Amongst all this throng of virgins, God hath provided a wife for Ahasuerus; having determined his choice, where most advantage shall rise to his forlorn people.

The Jews were miserably scattered over the world, in that woful deportation under Jeconiah. Scarce a handful of them returned to Jerusalem. The rest remain, still dispersed, where they may; but have leave to live. There are many thousands of them turned over, with the Babylonian monarchy, to the Persian. Amongst the rest, was Mordecai, the son of Jair, of the tribe of Benjamin; a man of no mean note or ability; who, living in Shushan, had brought up Hadassah, or Esther, his uncle's daughter, in a liberal fashion. It was happy for this orphan, that, in a region of captivity, she lighted into such good hands. Her wise kinsman finds it fit, that her breeding and habit should be Persian-like. In outward and civil forms, there was no need to vary from the heathen: her religion must be her own: the rest was so altogether theirs, that her very nation was not discerned.

The same God, that had given incomparable beauty to this Jewess, gave her also favor in the eyes of Hegai, the

keeper of the women. She is not only taken into the Persian court, as one of the selected virgins, but observed with more than ordinary respect. All necessaries for her speedy purification are brought to her: seven maids are allowed for her attendance; and the best and most honorable place in that seraglio is allotted to her: as if this great officer had designed her for a queen, before the choice of his master.

What strange preparation was here, for the impure bed of a heathen! Every virgin must be six months purified with oil of myrrh, and six other months perfumed with sweet odours; besides those special receipts, that were allowed to each on their own election. O God, what care, what cost is requisite to that soul, which should be addressed a fit bride, for thine own holy and glorious majesty! When we have scoured ourselves with the most cleanest oil of our repentance, and have perfumed ourselves with thy best graces and our perfectest obedience, it is the only praise of thy mercy, that we may be accepted.

The other virgins passed their probation, unregarded. When Esther's turn came, though she required nothing, but took what was given her; though she affected nothing, but brought that face, that demeanor, which nature had cast on her; no eye sees her without admiration. The king takes such pleasure in her beauty, that, contemning all the other vulgar forms, his choice is fully fixed on her. All things must prosper, where God hath intended the success.

The most wise providence of the Almighty fetches his projects from far. The preparation, and advantage, of his own people is in hand. For the contriving of this, Vashti shall be abandoned; the virgins shall be chosen; Esther only shall please Ahasuerus; Mordecai shall displease Haman; Haman's ruin shall raise Mordecai. The purposes of God cannot be judged by his remote actions; only the accomplishment shows his designs: in the mean time, it pleaseth him to look another way, than he moves; and to work his own ends, by arbitrary and unkindly accidents.

None but Esther shall succeed Vashti. She only carries the heart of Ahasuerus from all her sex. The royal

crown is set on her head; and, as Vashti was cast off at a feast, so with a solemn feast shall Esther be espoused. Here wanted no triumph, to express the joy of this great bridegroom; and, that the world might witness he could be no less loving than severe, all his provinces shall feel the pleasure of this happy match, in their immunities, in their rich gifts.

With what envious eyes, do we think, Vashti looked on her glorious rival! How doth she now, though too late, secretly chide her peevish will, that had thus stript her of her royal crown, and made way for a more happy successor! Little did she think, her refusal could have had so heinous a construction. Little did she fear, that one word, perhaps not ill-meant, should have forfeited her husband, her crown, and all that she was. Whoso is not wise enough to forecast the danger of an offence, or indiscretion, may have leisure enough of an unseasonable repentance.

That mind is truly great and noble, that is not changed with the highest prosperity. Queen Esther cannot forget her cousin Mordecai. No pomp can make her slight the charge of so dear a kinsman. In all her royalty, she casts her eye on him, amongst the throng of beholders; but she must not know him. Her obedience keeps her in awe; and will not suffer her to draw him up with her, to the participation of her honor. It troubles her not a little, to forbear this duty; but she must. It is enough for her, that Mordecai hath commanded her not to be known, who or whose she was.

Perhaps the wise Jew feared, that, while her honor was yet green and unsettled, the notice of her nation and the name of a despised captive might be some blemish to her in that proud court; whereas, afterwards, on the merit of her carriage and the full possession of all hearts, her name might dignify her nation and countermand all reproaches.

Mordecai was an officer in the court of Ahasuerus. His service called him daily to attend in the king's gate. Much better might he, being a Jew, serve a pagan master, than his foster-daughter might ascend to a pagan's bed.

If the necessity or convenience of his occasions called him to serve, his piety and religion called him to faithfulness in his service. Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, conspire against the life of their sovereign. No greatness can secure from treachery or violence. He, that ruled over millions of men, through a hundred and seven and twenty provinces, cannot assure himself from the hand of a villain. He, that had the power of other men's lives, is in danger of his own. Happy is that man, that is once possessed of a crown incorruptible, unfadable, reserved for him in heaven. No force, no treason can reach thither: there, can be no peril of either violence or forfeiture.

The likeliest defence of the person of any prince is the fidelity of his attendants. Mordecai overhears the whispering of these wicked conspirators, and reveals it to Esther. She, as glad of such an opportunity to commend unto Ahasuerus the loyalty of him whom she durst but secretly honor, reveals it to the king. The circumstances are examined; the plot is discovered; the traitors executed; the service recorded in the Persian annals.

A good foundation is thus laid for Mordecai's advancement, which yet is not over hastened, on either part. Worthy dispositions labor only to deserve well; leaving the care of their remuneration to them whom it concerns. It is fit, that God's leisure should be attended, in all his designments. The hour is set, when Mordecai shall be raised: if, in the mean time, there be an intervention, not only of neglect, but of fears and dangers, all these shall make his honor so much more sweet, more precious.—Esther i. ii.

HAMAN DISRESPECTED BY MORDECAI; MORDECAI'S MESSAGE TO ESTHER.

Besides the charge of his office, the care of Esther's prosperity calls Mordecai to the king's gate; and fixes him there.

With what inward contentment did he think of his so royal pupil! 'Here I sit among my fellows. Little doth the world think, that mine adopted child sits in the throne of Persia; that the great empress of the world owes her-

self to me. I might have more honor, I could not have so much secret comfort, if all Shushan knew what interest I have in queen Esther.'

While his heart is taken up with these thoughts, who should come ruffling by him, but the new-raised favorite of king Ahasuerus, Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. Him hath the great king unexpectedly advanced; and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. The gracious respects of princes are not always led by merit, but by their own will; which is ever affected to be so much the freer, as themselves would be held more great.

When the sun shines on the dial, every passenger will be looking at it. There needed no command of reverence, where Ahasuerus was pleased to countenance. All knees will bow alone even to forbidden idols of honor; how much more, where royal authority enjoins obeisance! All the servants, all the subjects, of king Ahasuerus are willingly prostrate, before this great minion of their sovereign. Only Mordecai stands stiff; as if he saw nothing more than a man, in that proud Agagite.

They are not observed, that do as the most; but if any one man shall vary from the multitude, all eyes are turned on him. Mordecai's fellow-officers note this palpable irreverence, and expostulate it; "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?' Considerest thou not, how far this affront reacheth? It is not the person of Haman, whom thou refusest to adore, but the king in him. Neither do we regard so much the man, as the command. Let him be never so vile, whom the king bids to be honored, with what safety can a subject examine the charge, or resist it? His unworthiness cannot dispense with our loyalty. What a dangerous wilfulness should it be, to incur the forfeiture of thy place, of thy life, for a courtesy! If thou wilt not bow with others, expect to suffer alone.'

'Perhaps,' they thought, 'this omission was unheedy.' In a case of ignorance or incogitancy, it was a friendly office to admonish: the sight of the error had been the remedy.

Mordecai hears their challenge, their advice; and thinks good to answer both, with silence: as willing they should imagine, his inflexibleness proceeded from a resolution; and that resolution on some secret grounds, which he needed not impart: at last yet he imparts thus much; 'Let it suffice, that I am a Jew, and Haman an Amalekite.'

After a private expostulation, the continuance of that open neglect is construed for a sullen obstinacy; and now, the monitors themselves grow sensible of the contempt. Men are commonly impatient, to lose the thank of their endeavors; and are prone to hate, whom they cannot reform. Partly, therefore, to pick a thank, and partly to revenge this contumacy, these officers turn informers against Mordecai; neither meant to make the matter fairer than it was. They tell Haman, how proud and stubborn a Jew sat amongst them; how ill they could brook so saucy an affront to be offered to his greatness; how seriously they had expostulated; how stomachfully the offender persisted; and beseech him, that he would be pleased, in his next passage, to cast some glances that way, and but observe the fashion of that intolerable insolency.

The proud Agagite cannot long endure the very expectation of such an indignity. On purpose doth he stalk thither, with higher than his ordinary steps; snuffing up the air as he goes; and would see the man, that durst deny reverence to the greatest prince of Persia.

Mordecai holds his old posture: only, he is so much more careless, as he sees Haman more disdainful and imperious. Neither of them goes about to hide his passion. One looked, as if he said, 'I hate the pride of Haman;' the other looked, as if he said, 'I will plague the contempt of Mordecai.' How did the eyes of Haman sparkle with fury, and, as it were, dart out deadly beams in the face of that despiteful Jew! How did he swell with indignation; and then again wax pale with anger! Shortly, his very brow and his motion bade Mordecai look for the utmost of revenge.

Mordecai foresees his danger, and contemns it. No

frowns, no threats, can supple those joints: he may break; he will not bow.

What shall we say then to this obfirmed resolution of Mordecai? What is it, what can it be, that so stiffens the knees of Mordecai, that death is more easy to him, than their incurvation? Certainly, if mere civility were in question, this wilful irreverence to so great a peer could not pass, without the just censure of a rude perverseness. It is religion that forbids this obeisance; and tells him, that such courtesy could not be free from sin. Whether it were, that more than human honor was required to this new-erected image of the great king; as the Persians were ever wont to be noted, for too much lavishness in these courtly devotions: or whether it were, that the ancient curse, wherewith God had branded the blood and stock of Haman, (Exod. xvii. 16. Deut. xxv. 19.) made it unlawful for an Israelite to give him any observance; for the Amalekites, of whose royal line Haman was descended, were the nation, with which God had sworn perpetual hostility, and whose memory he had straightly charged his people to root out from under heaven. 'How may I,' thinks he, 'adore, where God commands me to detest? How may I profess respect, where God professeth enmity? How may I contribute to the establishment of that seed on earth, which God hath charged to be pulled up from under heaven?' Outward actions of indifferency, when once they are felt to trench on the conscience, lay deep obligations on the soul, even while they are most slighted by careless hearts.

In what a flame of wrath doth Haman live this while! wherewith he could not but have consumed his own heart, had he not given vent to that rage, in his assured purposes of revenge.

Great men's anger is like to themselves, strong, fierce, ambitious of an excessive satisfaction. Haman scorns to take up with the blood of Mordecai. This were but a vulgar amends. Poor men can kill, where they hate; and expiate their own wrong, with the life of a single enemy: Haman's fury shall fly a higher pitch. Millions of throats are few enough to bleed for this offence. It is a Jew, that hath despited him; all the whole nation of

the Jews shall perish, for the stomach of this one. The monarchy of the world was now in the hand of the Persian. As Judea was within this compass, so there was scarce a Jew on earth, without the verge of the Persian dominions. The generation, the name, shall now die at once. Neither shall there be any memory of them, but this; 'There was a people, which, having been famous through the world for three thousand four hundred and fourscore years, were in a moment extinct, by the power of Haman, for default of a courtesy.'

Perhaps, that hereditary grudge and old antipathy, that was betwixt Israel and Amalek, stuck still in the heart of this Agagite. He might know, that God had commanded Israel, to root out Amalek from under heaven; and now, therefore, an Amalekite shall be ready to take this advantage against Israel.

It is extreme injustice, to dilate the punishment beyond the offence; and to enwrap thousands of innocents within the trespass of one. How many that were yet unborn when Haman was unsaluted, must rue the fact they lived not to know! How many millions of Jews were then living, that knew not there was a Mordecai! All of them are fetched into one condition; and must suffer, ere they can know their offence.

Oh the infinite distance, betwixt the unjust cruelty of men, and the just mercies of the Almighty! Even Caiaphas himself could say, 'It is better, that one man die, than that all the people should perish:' and here Haman can say, 'It is better, that all the people should perish, than that one man should die.' Thy mercy, O God, by the willing death of one that had not sinned, hath defrayed the just death of a world of sinners: while the injurious rigor of a man, for the supposed fault of one, would destroy a whole nation, that had not offended. It is true, that, by the sin of one, death reigned over all; but it was, because all sinned in that one. Had not all men been in Adam, all had not fallen in him, all had not died in him. It was not the man, but mankind that fell into sin, and by sin into death. No man can complain of punishment, while no man can exempt himself from the transgression. Unmerciful Haman would

have imbrued his hands in that blood, which he could not but confess innocent.

It is a rare thing, if the height of favor cause not presumption. Such is Haman's greatness, that he takes his design for granted, ere it can receive a motion. The fittest days for this great massacre are determined by the lots of their common divination; according whereunto, Haman chooseth the hour of this bloody suit; and now, waited on by opportunity, he addresseth himself to king Ahasuerus: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people, in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of the officers.'

With what cunning hath this man couched his malice! He doth not say, 'There is a Jew, that hath affronted me; let me be avenged of his nation:' this rancor was too monstrous to be confessed. Perhaps this suggestion might have bred in the mind of Ahasuerus a conceit of Haman's ill-nature and intolerable immanity; but his pretences are plausible, and such as drive at no other than the public good.

Every word hath his insinuation.

'It is a scattered people.' Were the nation entire, their maintenance could not but stand with the king's honor; but now, since they are but stragglers, as their loss would be insensible, so their continuance and mixture cannot but be prejudicial. It was not the fault, it was the misery, of these poor Jews, that they were dispersed; and now their dispersion is made an argument of their extirpation: therefore must they be destroyed from the earth, because they were scattered over the earth. As good, so evils, draw on each other. That, which should plead for pity in the well-affected, is a motive to cruelty in savage minds. Seldom ever hath extremity of mischief seized, where easier afflictions have not been billeted before. All faithful Jews had wont to say unto God, 'Have mercy upon us, O God, and save us, for our soul is full of contempt, and we are scattered amongst the heathen;' and here this enemy can say of

them to Ahasuerus, 'Destroy them, for they are scattered; root them out, for they are condemned.' How much better is it to fall into the hands of God, than of men; since that, which whets the sword of men, works commiseration in the Almighty!

Besides the dissipation of the persons, 'Their laws are diverse from all people:' all other people live by thy laws; they only by their own: and how can this singularity of their fashions but breed disorder and inconvenience? Did they live in some corner of the earth apart, the difference in religion and government could not import much; now, that they are dispersed amongst all thy subjects, what do these uncouth forms of theirs, but teach all the world to be irregular? Why should they live under thy protection, that will not be governed by thy laws?' Wicked Haman! what were the laws of Israel, but the laws of God? If this be a quarrel, what shall the death of the Jews be other, than martyrdom? The diversity of judgment and practice from the rest of the world, hath been an old and envious imputation cast on God's church. What if we be singled from others, while we walk with God? In matters lawful, arbitrary, indifferent, wisdom teacheth us to conform ourselves to all others; but where God hath laid a special imposition on us, we must either vary, or sin. The greatest glory of Israel was their laws; wherein they as far exceeded all other nations, as heaven is above earth; yet, here their laws are quarrelled, and are made the inducements of their destruction. It is not possible, that the church of God should escape persecution, while that which it hath good is maligned; while that offends, which makes it happy.

'Yet, that they have laws of their own, were not so unsufferable, if, withal, they did observe thine, O king; but these Jews, as they are unconformable, so they are seditious: 'They keep not the king's laws.'' Thou slanderest, Haman. They could not keep their own laws, if they kept not the king's; for their laws call them to obedience unto their sovereigns, and adjudge hell to the rebellious. In all those hundred and seven-and-twenty provinces, king Ahasuerus hath no subjects, but them. They obey out of conscience; others, out of fear. Why

are they charged with that, which they do most abhor? What can be the ground of this crimination? Ahasuerus commanded all knees to bow to Haman. A Jew only refuses. Malicious Haman! He, that refused to bow unto thee, had sufficiently approved his loyalty to Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus had not been, if Mordecai had not been a good subject. Hath the king no laws, but what concern thine adoration? Set aside religion (wherein the Jew is ready to present, if not active, yet passive obedience), and name that Persian law, which a Jew dares break. As I never yet read or heard of a conscionable Israelite, that hath not passed under this calumniation; so I cannot yield him a true Israelite, that deserves it. In vain doth he profess to acknowledge a God in heaven, that denies homage to his deputy on earth.

'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them.' Worldly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit or loss; neither have they grace to know, that nothing is profitable but what is honest; nothing so desperately incommodious, as wickedness. They must needs offend by rule, that measure all things by profit, and measure profit by their imagination. How easy is it, to suggest strange untruths, when there is nobody to make answer! False Haman, how is it not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews? If thou construe this profit for honor, the king's honor is in the multitude of subjects; and what people more numerous than they? If for gain, the king's profit is in the largeness of his tributes; and what people are more deep in their payments? If for service, what people are more officious? How can it stand with the king's profit, to bereave himself of subjects, his subjects of their lives, his exchequer of their tributes, his state of their defence? He is a weak politician, that knows not to gild over the worst project, with a pretence of public utility. No name under heaven hath made so many fools, so many villains, as this of profit.

Lastly, as Ahasuerus reaps nothing but disprofit by the lives of the Jews, so he shall reap no small profit by their deaths: 'I will pay ten thousand talents of silver, to the king's treasury, for this execution.' If revenge were not very sweet to the malicious man, he could not be content to purchase it at so high a rate. How do we see daily,

that the thirst hereof carries men to a riotous prodigality of estate, body, soul! Cruel Haman! if thou couldst have swimmed in a whole sea of Jewish blood, if thou couldst have raised mountains of their carcasses, if thou couldst have made all Persia thy shambles, who would have given thee one farthing for all those piles of flesh, for all those streams of blood? yea, who would not rather have been at charge, for the avoiding of the annoyances of those slaughtered bodies, which thou offerest to buy at ten thousand talents? It were a happy thing, if charity could enlarge itself but so much as malice; if the preservation of mankind could be so much beholden to our bounty, as the destruction.

Now, when all these are laid together, the baseness and dispersedness of the people, the diversity of the laws, the irregularity of their government, the rebellion of their practice, the inconvenience of their toleration, the gain of their extirpation, what could the wit or art of man devise more insinuative, more likely to persuade? How could it be but Ahasuerus must needs think, since he could not suspect the ground of this suit, 'What a zealous patriot have I raised, that can be content to buy off the incommodity of the state, at his own charge! How worthy is he rather of the aid, both of my power and purse! Why should I be feed, to ease my kingdoms of rebels? The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as seemeth good to thee.' Without all delay, the secretaries are called to write the warrants; the king's ring is given to seal them; the posts are sent out to carry them into all provinces; the day set, wherein all Jews, of all ages, of both sexes, through the hundred and seven-and-twenty provinces of the king, shall be sacrificed to the wrath of Haman.

In all the carriage of Ahasuerus, who sees not too much headiness of passion? Vashti is cast off for a trifle; the Jews are given to the slaughter for nothing: his rage in the one, his favor in the other, is too impotent. He is not a worse husband, than a king.

The bare word of Haman is enough to kill so many subjects. No disposition can be more dangerous in great persons, than violence of affection mixed with credulity.

Oh the seeming inequality of human conditions! 'The

king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.' It is a woful thing, to see great ones quaff the tears of the oppressed; and to hear them make music of shrieks.

With what lamentation, do we think, all the synagogues of Jews, through the world, received this fatal message of their proclaimed destruction! How do they bemoan themselves, each to other! How do their conjoined cries fill heaven and earth!

But, above all, what sackcloth and ashes could suffice woful Mordecai, that found in himself the occasion of all this slaughter? What soul could be capable of more bitterness, than he felt? while he could not but think, 'Wretched man that I am! it is I, that have brought all this calamity on my nation. It is I, that have been the ruin of my people. Wo is me, that ever I put myself into the court, into the service of a Pagan. How unhappy was I, to cast myself into these straits, that I must either honor an Agagite, or draw a vengeance on Israel! Yet how could I imagine, that the flame of Haman's rage would have broke out so far? Might that revenge have determined in my blood, how happy should I have been! Now, I have brought death on many thousands of innocents, that cannot know wherefore they die. Why did I not hide myself rather, from the place of that proud Amalekite? Why did I stand out in contestation, with so over-powerful an enemy? Alas! no man of Israel shall so much as live to curse me: only mine enemies shall record my name with ignominy; and say, 'Mordecai was the bane of his nation.' Oh, that my zeal should have reserved me for so heavy a service! Where now are those vain ambitions, wherewith I pleased myself in this great match of Esther? How foundly did I hope, by this undue means, to raise myself and my people! Yea, is not this carnal presumption the quarrel, that God hath against me? Do I not therefore smart from these Pagans, for that I secretly affected this uncircumcised alliance? Howsoever it be, yet, O God, what have thy people done? Oh, let it be thy just mercy, that I may perish alone.'

In these sad thoughts did Mordecai spend his heart, while he walked mournfully in sackcloth, before that gate,

wherein he was wont to sit. Now, his habit bars his approach. No sackcloth might come within the court. Lo, that, which is welcomest in the court of heaven, is here excluded from the presence of this earthly royalty: 'A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.'

Neither did it a little add to the sorrow of Mordecai, to hear the bitter insultations of his former monitors: 'Did we not advise thee better? Did we not fore-admonish thee of thy danger? See now the issue of thine obstinacy. Now see, what it is for thine earthen pitcher to knock with brass? Now, where is the man, that would needs contest with Haman? Hast thou not now brought thy matters to a fair pass? Thy stomach had long owed thee a spite, and now it hath paid thee. Who can pity thy wilfulness? Since thou wouldst needs deride our counsel, we will take leave to laugh at thy sackcloth.' Nothing but scorns, and griefs, and terrors, present themselves to miserable Mordecai. All the external buffets of adversaries were slight, to the wounds that he hath made and felt in his own heart.

The perpetual intelligences, that were closely held betwixt Esther and Mordecai, could not suffer his public sorrow to be long concealed from her. The news of his sackcloth afflicts her, ere she can suspect the cause. Her crown doth but clog her head, while she hears of his ashes. True friendship transforms us into the condition of those we love; and, if it cannot raise them to our cheerfulness, draws us down to their dejection.

Fain would she uncase her foster-father of these mournful weeds, and change his sackcloth for tissue; that yet, at least, his clothes might not hinder his access to her presence, for the free opening of his griefs.

It is but a slight sorrow, that abides to take in outward comforts. Mordecai refuses that kind offer; and would have Esther see, that his affliction was such, as that he might well resolve to put off his sackcloth and his skin at once; that he must mourn to death, rather than see her face to live.

The good queen is astonished, with this constant humiliation of so dear a friend; and now she sends Hatach, a trusty, though a Pagan, attendant, to inquire into the occasion of this so irremediable heaviness. It should

seem Esther inquired not greatly into matters of state. That, which perplexed all Shushan, was not yet known to her. Her followers, not knowing her to be a Jewess, conceived not how the news might concern her, and therefore had forborne the relation. Mordecai first informs her, by her messenger, of the decree, that was gone out against all her nation; of the day, wherein they must prepare to bleed; of the sum, which Haman had proffered for their heads; and delivers the copy of that bloody edict; charging her, now, if ever, to bestir herself; and to improve all her love, all her power, with king Ahasuerus, in a speedy and humble supplication, for the saving of the life (not of himself so much, as) of her people.

It was tidings able to confound a weak heart; and hers, so much the more, as she could apprehend nothing, but impossibility of redress. She needs but to put Mordecai in mind of that, which all the king's servants and subjects knew well enough, that the Persian law made it no less than death for whomsoever, man or woman, that should press into the inner court of the king, uncalled. Nothing, but the royal sceptre extended, could keep that presumptuous offender from the grave. For her, thirty days were now passed, since she was called in to the king; an intermission, that might be justly suspicious. Whether the heat of his first affection were thus soon, of itself, allayed towards her; or, whether some suggestions of a secret enemy, perhaps his Agagite, might have set him off; or, whether some more pleasing object may have laid hold on his eyes; whatever it might be, this absence could not but argue some strangeness, and this strangeness must needs imply a danger in her bold intrusion. She could bewail therefore, she could not hope to remedy, this dismal day of her people.

This answer, in the ears of Mordecai, sounded truth, but weakness; neither can he take up with so feeble a return. These occasions require other spirits, other resolutions, which must be quickened by a more stirring reply: 'Think not with thyself, that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from ano-

ther place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth, whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

The expectation of death had not quailed the strong heart of faithful Mordecai. Even while he mourns, his zeal droops not. There could have been no life in that breast, which this message could not have roused.

'What then? Is it death, that thou fearest, in this attempt of thy supplication? What other than death awaits thee, in the neglect of it? There is but this difference; sue, and thou mayest die; sue not, and thou must die. What blood hast thou, but Jewish? And if these unalterable edicts exempt no living soul, what shall become of thine? And canst thou be so vainly timorous, as to die for fear of death? to prefer certainty of danger, before a possibility of hopes? Away with this weak cowardice, unworthy of an Israelite, unworthy of a queen. But if faint-heartedness or private respects shall seal up thy lips, or withhold thine aid from the hand of thy people; if thou canst so far neglect God's church; know thou, that God will not neglect it. It shall not be in the power of tyrants, to root out his chosen seed. That Holy One of Israel shall rather work miracles from heaven, than his inheritance shall perish on earth. And how just shall it then be for that jealous God, to take vengeance on thee and thy father's house, for this cold unhelpfulness to his distressed church! Suffer me therefore to adjure thee, by all that tenderness of love, wherewith I have trained up thine orphan infancy; by all those dear and thankful respects, which thou hast vowed to me again; by the name of the God of Israel, whom we serve; that thou awaken and stir up thy holy courage, and dare to adventure thy life, for the saving of many. It hath pleased the Almighty, to raise thee up to that height of honor, which our progenitors could little expect: why shouldst thou be wanting to him, that hath been so bountiful to thee? yea, why should I not think that God hath put this very act into the intendment of thine exaltation; having, on purpose, thus seasonably hoisted thee up to the throne, that thou mayest rescue his poor church from an utter ruin?'

Oh the admirable faith of Mordecai, that shines

through all these clouds; and in the thickest of these fogs, descries a cheerful glimpse of deliverance! He saw the day of their common destruction enacted; he knew the Persian decrees to be unalterable; but, withal, he knew there was a Messiah to come. He was so well acquainted with God's covenanted assurances to his church, that he, through the midst of those bloody resolutions, foresees indemnity to Israel; rather trusting the promises of God, than the threats of men. This is the victory, that overcomes all the fears and fury of the world, even our faith.

It is quarrel enough against any person or community, not to have been aidful to the distresses of God's people. Not to ward the blow, if we may, is construed for little better than striking. Till we have tried our utmost, we know not whether we have done that we came for.

Mordecai hath said enough. These words have so put a new life into Esther, that she is resolute to hazard the old; 'Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.' Heroical thoughts do well befit great actions. Life can never be better adventured, than where it shall be gain to lose it. There can be no law, against the humble deprecation of evils. Where the necessity of God's church calls to us, no danger should withhold us, from all honest means of relief. Deep humiliations must make way, for the success of great enterprises. We are most capable of mercy, when we are thoroughly empty. A short hunger doth but whet the appetite; but so long an abstinence meets death half way, to prevent it. Well may they enjoin sharp penances unto others, who practise it on themselves.

It was the face of Esther, that must hope to win Ahasuerus; yet that shall be macerated with fasting, that she may prevail. A carnal heart would have prepared the flesh, that it might allure those wanton eyes: she pines it, that she may please. God, and not she, must work the heart of the king. Faith teaches her rather to trust her devotions, than her beauty. Esther iii. iv.

ESTHER SUING TO AHASUERUS.

THE Jews are easily entreated to fast, who had received in themselves the sentence of death. What pleasure could they take in meat, that know what day they must eat their last?

The three days of abstinence are expired. Now Esther changes her spirits, no less than her clothes. Who, that sees that face and that habit, can say she had mourned, she had fasted? Never did her royal apparel become her so well. That God, before whom she had humbled herself, made her so much more beautiful, as she hath been more dejected.

And now, with a winning confidence, she walks into the inner court of the king, and puts herself into that forbidden presence; as if she said, 'Here I am, with my life in my hand. If it please the king to take it, it is ready for him. Vashti, my predecessor, forfeited her place, for not coming when she was called. Esther shall now hazard the forfeiture of her life, for coming when she is not called. It is necessity, not disobedience, that hath put me on this bold approach. According to thy construction, O king, I do either live or die: either shall be welcome.'

The unexpectedness of pleasing objects makes them, many times, the more acceptable. The beautiful countenance, the graceful demeanor, and goodly presence, of Esther, have no sooner taken the eyes, than they have ravished the heart of king Ahasuerus. Love hath soon banished all dreadfulness; 'and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre, that was in his hand.' Moderate intermission is so far from cooling the affection, that it inflames it. Had Esther been seen every day, perhaps that satiety had abated of the height of her welcome; now, three-and-thirty days' retiredness hath endeared her more to the surfeited eyes of Ahasuerus.

Had not the golden sceptre been held out, where had queen Esther been? The Persian kings affected a stern awfulness to their subjects. It was death, to solicit them, uncalled. How safe, how easy, how happy a thing it is, to have to do with the King of heaven; who is so pleased with

our access, that he solicits suitors; who, as he is unweariable with our requests, so is he infinite in his beneficences!

How gladly doth Esther touch the top of that sceptre, by which she holds her life! and now, while she thinks it well that she may live, she receives, besides pardon, favor: 'What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, even to the half of the kingdom.' Commonly, when we fear most, we speed best. God then most of all magnifies his bounty to us, when we have most afflicted ourselves. Over-confident expectations are seldom but disappointed; while humble suspicions go laughing away. It was the benefit and safety of but one piece of the kingdom, that Esther comes to sue for; and behold, Ahasuerus offers her the free power of the half. He, that gave Haman, at the first word, the lives of all his Jewish subjects, is ready to give Esther half his kingdom, ere she ask. Now she is no less amazed at the loving munificence of Ahasuerus, than she was before afraid of his austerity. 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will.'

It is not good to swallow favors too greedily; lest they either choke us in the passage, or prove hard of digestion. The wise queen, however she might seem to have a fair opportunity offered to her suit, finds it not good to apprehend it too suddenly; as desiring, by this small dilation, to prepare the ear and heart of the king, for so important a request.

Now, all her petition ends in a banquet; 'If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet, that I have prepared for him.' It is an easy favor, to receive a small courtesy, where we offer to give great. Haman is called; the king comes to Esther's table; and now, highly pleased with his entertainment, he himself solicits her to propound that suit, for which her modesty would, but durst not, solicit him. Bashfulness shall lose nothing, at the hand of well-governed greatness.

Yet still, Esther's suit sticks in her teeth; and dares not come forth, without a further preface of time and expectation. Another banquet must pass, ere this reckon-

ing can be given in. Other suitors wait long, for the delivery of their petition; longer, for the receipt of their answer: here, the king is fain to wait for his suit. Whether Esther's heart would not yet serve her to contest with so strong an adversary, as Haman, without further recollection; or, whether she desired to get better hold of the king, by endearing him with so pleasing entertainments; or, whether she would thus ripen her hopes, by working in the mind of king Ahasuerus a fore-conceit of the greatness and difficulty of that suit, which was so loath to come forth; or, whether she meant thus to give scope to the pride and malice of Haman, for his more certain ruin: howsoever it were, to-morrow is a new day, set for Esther's second banquet and third petition.

The king is not invited without Haman. Favors are sometimes done to men, with a purpose of displeasure. Doubtless, Haman tasteth of the same cates with his master; neither could he in the forehead of Esther read any other characters, than of respect and kind applause; yet had she then, in her hopes, designed him to a just revenge. Little do we know, by outward carriages, in what terms we stand, with either God or man.

Every little wind raiseth up a bubble. How is Haman now exalted in himself, with the singular graces of queen Esther; and begins to value himself so much more, as he sees himself higher in the rate of others' opinion.

Only surly and sullen Mordecai is an allay to his happiness. No edict of death can bow the knees of that stout Jew: yea, the notice of that bloody cruelty of this Agagite hath stiffened them so much the more. Before, he looked at Haman as an Amalekite; now, as a persecutor. Disdain and anger look out at those eyes, and bid that proud enemy do his worst. No doubt, Mordecai had been listening after the speed of queen Esther; how she came in to the king, how she was welcomed with the golden sceptre, and with the more precious words of Ahasuerus; how she had entertained the king; how she pleased: the news had made him quit his sackcloth, and raised his courage to a more scornful neglect of his professed adversary.

Haman comes home, I know not whether more full of pride or of rage; calls an inward council of his choice

friends, together with his wife; makes a glorious report of all his wealth, magnificence, height of favor, both with the king and queen; and, at last, after all his sunshine, sets in this cloudy epilogue, 'Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.' It is seldom seen, that God allows, even to the greatest darlings of the world, a perfect contentment. Something they must have to complain of, that shall give an unsavory verdure to their sweetest morsels; and make their very felicity, miserable.

The wit of women hath wont to be noted, for more sudden and more sharp. Zeresh, the wife of Haman, sets on foot that motion of speedy revenge, which is applauded by the rest: 'Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou to the king, that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king, unto the banquet.'

I do not hear them say; 'Be patient awhile. Thou hast already set Mordecai his last day. The month Adar will not be long in coming. The determination of his death hath made him desperate. Let him, in the mean time, eat his own heart, in envy at thy greatness.' But they rather advise of a quick dispatch. Malice is a thing full of impatience; and hates delay of execution, next unto mercy.

While any grudge lies at the heart, it cannot be freely cheerful. Forced smiles are but the hypocrisy of mirth. How happy were it for us, if we could be so zealously careful, to remove the hindrances of our true spiritual joy, those stubborn corruptions, that will not stoop to the power of grace!—Esther v.

MORDECAI HONORED BY HAMAN.

The wit of Zeresh had like to have gone beyond the wit of Esther. Had not the working providence of the Almighty contrived these events, beyond all hopes, all conceits, Mordecai had been dispatched, ere Esther's second banquet. To-morrow was the day pitched for both their designs. Had not the stream been unexpectedly turned, in vain had the queen blamed her delays; Mordecai's breakfast had prevented Esther's

dinner: for certainly he, that had given to Haman so many thousand lives, would never have made dainty, on the same suit, to anticipate one of those, whom he had condemned to the slaughter. But God meant better things to his church; and fetches about all his holy purposes, after a wonderful fashion, in the very instant of opportunity; 'He, that keepeth Israel, and neither slumbereth nor sleepeth,' causeth sleep that night to depart from him, that had decreed to root out Israel.

Great Ahasuerus, that commanded a hundred and seven-and-twenty provinces, cannot command an hour's sleep. Poverty is rather blessed with the freedom of rest, than wealth and power. Cares and surfeit withhold that from the great, which presseth on the spare diet and labor of the meanest. Nothing is more tedious, than an eager pursuit of denied sleep; which, like to a shadow, flies away so much faster, as it is more followed. Experience tells us, that this benefit is best solicited by neglect; and soonest found, when we have forgotten to seek it.

Whether to deceive the time, or to bestow it well, Ahasuerus shall spend his restless hours in the Chronicles of his time. Nothing is more requisite for princes, than to look back on their own actions and events, and those of their predecessors. The examination of fore-passed actions makes them wise; of events, thankful and cautelous.

Amongst those voluminous registers of acts and monuments, which so many scores of provinces must needs yield, the book shall open on Mordecai's discovery of the late treason of the two eunuchs: the reader is turned thither, by an insensible sway of Providence. Our most arbitrary or casual actions are overruled by a hand in heaven.

The king now feels afresh the danger of that conspiracy; and, as great spirits abide not to smother or bury good offices, inquires into the recompense of so royal a service; 'What honor, and dignity, hath been done to Mordecai, for this?' Surely Mordecai did but his duty. He had heinously sinned, if he had not revealed this wicked treachery; yet Ahasuerus takes thought for his remuneration. How much more careful art thou, O God

of all mercies, to reward the weak obedience of thine, at the best, unprofitable servants!

'That, which was intended to procure rest, sets it off. King Ahasuerus is unquiet in himself, to think that so great a merit should lie but so long neglected: neither can he find any peace in himself, till he have given order for a speedy retribution. Hearing therefore by his servants, that Haman was below in the court, he sends for him up, to consult with him, 'What should be done to the man, whom the king delighteth to honor.'

O marvellous concurrence of circumstances, drawn together by the infinite wisdom and power of the Almighty! Who, but Haman, should be the man? And when, should Haman be called to advise of Mordecai's honor, but in the very instant, when he came to sue for Mordecai's hanging? Had Ahasuerus but slept that night, Mordecai had been that morning advanced fifty cubits higher than the earth, ere the king could have remembered to whom he was beholden.

What shall we say then, to reconcile these cross passions in Ahasuerus? Before he signed that decree of killing all the Jews, he could not but know, that a Jew had saved his life; and now, after that he had enacted the slaughter of all Jews, as rebels, he is giving order to honor a Jew, as his preserver. It were strange, if great persons, in the multitude of their distractions, should not let fall some incongruities.

Yet, who can but think, that king Ahasuerus meant, on some second thoughts, to make amends to Mordecai?

Neither can he choose but put these two together; 'The Jews are appointed to death, at the suit of Haman: this Mordecai is a Jew; how then can I do more grace to him, that hath saved my life, than to command him to be honored by that man, who would spill his?'

When Haman heard himself called up to the bedchamber of his master, he thinks himself too happy, in so early an opportunity of presenting his suit; but yet more in the pleasing question of Ahasuerus; wherein he could not but imagine, that favor forced itself on him with strange importunity; for how could he conceive, that any intention of more than ordinary honor could fall besides himself? Self-love, like to a good stomach, draws to it

self what nourishment it likes, and casts off that which offends it.

Haman will be sure to be no niggard, in advising those ceremonies of honor, which he thinks meant to his own person. Could he have once dreamed, that this grace had been purposed to any under heaven, besides himself, he had not been so lavish, in counselling so pompous a show of excessive magnificence. Now, the king's own royal apparel, and his own steed, is not sufficient, except the royal crown also make up the glory of him, who shall thus triumph in the king's favor. Yet all this were nothing, in base hands. The actor shall be the best part of this great pageant: 'Let this apparel and this horse be delivered to one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal, whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.' Honor is more in him that gives, than him that receives it. To be honored by the unworthy is little better than disgrace. No meaner person will serve to attend this Agagite, in his supposed greatness, than one of the noblest princes. The ambition is too high flown, that seeks glory in the servility of equals. The place adds much to the act. There is small heart in a concealed honor. It is nothing, unless the streets of Shushan be witnesses of this pomp, and ring with that gracious acclamation. The vain hearts of proud men can easily devise those means, whereby they may best set out themselves. Oh, that we would equally affect the means of true and immortal glory!

The heart of man is never so cold within him, as when, from the height of the expectation of good, it falls into a sudden sense of evil. So did this Agagite. 'Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast said.' How was Haman thunderstricken with this killing word, 'Do thou so to Mordecai!' I dare say, all the honors, that Ahasuerus had heaped on Haman, cannot countervail this one vexation.

Doubtless, at first, he distrusts his ear; and then muses, whether the king be in earnest: at last, when he

hears the charge so seriously doubled, and finds himself forced to believe it, he begins to think, 'What means this inconceivable alteration? Is there no man, in all the court of Persia, to be picked out for extraordinary honor, but Mordecai? Is there no man to be picked out for the performance of this honor to him, but Haman? Have I but one proud enemy in all the world, and am I singled out to grace him? Did it gall me to the heart, and make all my happiness tedious to me, to see that this Jew would not bow to me, and must I now bow to him? That, which he would rather die, and forfeit the life of all his nation, than do to me, notwithstanding the king's command; shall I be forced, by the king's command, to do unto him? Yea, did he refuse to give but a cap and a knee to my greatness, and must I lacky so base a fellow through the streets: must I be his herald, to proclaim his honor through all Shushan? Why do I not let the king know the insolent affronts, that he hath offered me? Why do I not signify to my sovereign, that my errand now was for another kind of advancement to Mordecai? If I obtain not my desired revenge, yet at least I shall prevail so far, as to exempt myself from this officious attendance, upon so unequal an enemy. And yet, that motion cannot be now safe. I see the king's heart is, on what ground soever, bent on this action. Should I fly off never so little, after my word so directly passed, perhaps my coldness or opposition might be construed, as some wayward contestation with my master: especially, since the service, that Mordecai hath done to the king, is of a higher nature, than the despite, which he hath done to me. I will, I must give way, for the time. Mine humble yieldance, when all the carriage of this business shall be understood, shall, I doubt not, make way for mine intended revenge. Mordecai, I will honor thee now, that, by these steps, I may ere long raise thee many cubits higher. I will obey the command of my sovereign, in observing thee, that he may reward the merit of my loyalty, in thine execution.'

Thus resolved, Haman goes forth, with a face and heart full of distraction, full of confusion; and addresses himself to the attiring, to the attending, of his old adversary, and new master, Mordecai.

What looks, do we now think, were cast on each other, at their first greeting! Their eyes had not forgotten their old language. Certainly, when Mordecai saw Haman come into the room where he was, he could not but think: 'This man hath long thirsted for my blood, and now he comes to fetch it. I shall not live to see the success of Esther, or the fatal day of my nation. It was known that morning in the court, what a lofty gibbet Haman had provided for Mordecai; and why might it not have come to Mordecai's ear? What could he therefore now imagine other, than that he was called out to that execution? But, when he saw the royal robe that Haman brought to him, he thinks, 'Is it not enough for this man to kill me, but he must mock me too? What an addition is this to the former cruelty, thus to insult and play on my last distress!' But, when he yet saw the royal crown ready to be set on his head, and the king's own horse richly furnished at his gate, and found himself raised by princely hands into that royal seat, he thinks, 'What may all this mean? Is it the purpose of mine adversary, that I shall die in hate? Would he have me hanged in triumph?' At last, when he sees such a train of Persian peers attending him, with a grave reverence; and hears Haman proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor;' finding this pomp to be serious and well meant, he imagines, in all likelihood, that this unexpected change proceeds from the suit of his Esther. Now, he begins to lift up his head, and to hope well of himself and his people; and could not but say within himself, that he had not fasted for nothing.

Oh the wondrous alteration that one morning hath made in the court of Persia! He, that was yesternight despised by Haman's footmen, is now waited on by Haman and all his fellow princes. He, that yesternight had the homage of all knees but one, and was ready to burst for the lack of that, now doth obeisance to that one, by whom he was wilfully neglected. It was not Ahasuerus, that wrought this strange mutation: it was the overruling power of the Almighty, whose immediate hand would thus prevent Esther's suit, that he might challenge all the thank to himself. While princes have their own

wills, they must do his; and shall either exalt or depress, according to divine appointment.

I should commend Haman's obedience, in his humble condescent to so unpleasing and harsh a command of his master, were it not, that, either he durst do no other, or that he thus stooped for an advantage. It is a thankless respect, that is either forced, or for ends. True subjection is free and absolute; out of the conscience of duty, not out of fear or hopes.

All Shushan is in a maze, at this sudden glory of Mordecai; and studies how to reconcile this day with the thirteenth of Adar.

Mordecai had reason to hope well. It could not stand with the honor of the king, to kill him, whom he saw cause to advance: neither could this be any other, than the beginning of a durable promotion; otherwise, what recompense had an hour's riding been, to so great a service?

On the other side, Haman droops, and hath changed passions with Mordecai. Neither was that Jew ever more deeply afflicted with the decree of his own death, than this Agagite was with that Jew's honor. How heavy doth it lie at Haman's heart, that no tongue, but his, might serve to proclaim Mordecai happy! Even the greatest minions of the world must have their turns of sorrow. With a covered head, and a dejected countenance, doth he hasten home; and longs to impart his grief, where he had received his advice.

It was but cold comfort, that he finds from his wife Zeresh and his friends: 'If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.' Out of the mouth of Pagans, O God, thou hast ordained strength, that thou mayest still the enemy and the avenger. What credit hath thy great name won with these barbarous nations, that they can out of all experience make maxims of thine undoubted protection of thy people, and the certain ruin of their adversaries! Men find no difference in themselves. The face of a Jew looks so like other men's, that Esther and Mordecai were not, of long, taken for what they were. He, that made them, makes the distinction betwixt them; so as a Jew

may fall before a Persian, and get up and prevail; but if a Persian, or whosoever of the Gentiles, begin to fall before a Jew, he can neither stay nor rise. There is an invisible hand of Omnipotency, that strikes in for his own and confounds their opposites. O God, neither is thy hand shortened, nor thy bowels straitened in thee. Thou art still and ever thyself. If we be thy true spiritual Israel, neither earth nor hell shall prevail against us. We shall either stand sure, or surely rise; while our enemies shall lick the dust.—Esther vi.

HAMAN HANGED; MORDECAI ADVANCED.

HAMAN'S day is now come. That vengeance, which hath hitherto slept, is now awake; and rouseth up itself to a just execution. That heavy morning was but the preface to his last sorrow; and the sad presage of friends is verified, in the speaking. While the word was in their mouths, the messengers were at the door, to fetch Haman to his funeral-banquet.

How little do we know what is towards us! 'As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.'

It was, as Haman conceived, the only privilege of his dearness, and the comfort of his present heaviness, that he only was called with the king to Esther's banquet, when this only was meant for his bane. The face of this invitation is fair, and promiseth much; and now, the ingenious man begins to set good constructions on all events. 'Surely,' thinks he, 'the king was tied in his honor, to give some public gratification to Mordecai. So good an office could deserve no less, than an hour's glory. But little doth my master know, what terms there are betwixt me and Mordecai. Had he fully understood the insolencies of this Jew, and should notwithstanding have enjoined me to honor him, I might have had just cause to complain of disgrace and disparagement; but now, since all this business hath been carried in ignorance and casualty, why do I wrong myself, in being too much affected with that, which was not ill meant? Had either the king or queen abated aught of their favor to me, I might have dined at home: now, this renewed invitation

argues me to stand right in the grace of both: and why may not I hope, this day, to meet with a good occasion of my desired revenge? How just will it seem to the king, that the same man, whom he hath publicly rewarded for his loyalty, should now be publicly punished for his disobedience!"

With such-like thoughts Haman cheers up himself; and addresseth himself to the royal banquet, with a countenance, that would fain seem to forget his morning's task. Esther works her face to an unwilling smile on that hateful guest; and the king, as not guilty of any indignity that he hath put on his favorite, frames himself to as much cheerfulness, as his want of rest would permit. The table is royally furnished, with all delicate confections, with all pleasing liquors. King Ahasuerus so eats, as one, that both knew he was, and meant to make himself, welcome: Haman so pours in, as one, that meant to drown his cares.

And now, in this fulness of cheer, the king hungers for that long-delayed suit of queen Esther. Thrice hath he graciously called for it; and, as a man constant to his own favors, thrice hath he, in the same words, vowed the performance of it, though to the half of his kingdom. It falls out oftentimes, that when large promises fall suddenly from great persons, they abate by leisure, and shrink on cold thoughts: here, king Ahasuerus is not more liberal in his offer, than firm in his resolutions; as if his first word had been, like his law, unalterable. I am ashamed to miss that steadiness in Christians which I find in a Pagan. It was a great word that he had said; yet he eats it not, as over-lavishly spoken; but doubles and trebles it, with hearty assurances of a real prosecution; while those tongues, which profess the name of the true God, say and unsay at pleasure; recanting their good purposes; contradicting their own just engagements on no cause, but their own changeableness.

It is not for queen Esther to drive off any longer. The same wisdom, that taught her to defer her suit, now teaches her to propound it. A well-chosen season is the greatest advantage of any actions; which, as it is seldom found in haste, so is too often lost in delay. Now therefore,

with an humble and graceful obeisance, and with a countenance full of modest fear and sad gravity, she so delivers her petition, that the king might see it was necessity that both forced it on her and wrung it from her: 'If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.'

Expectation is either a friend or an enemy, according to the occasion. Ahasuerus looked for some high and difficult boon: now that he hears his queen beg for her life, it could not be, but that the surplusage of his love to her must be turned into fury against her adversary; and his zeal must be so much more to her, as her suit was more meek and humble: 'For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.'

Crafty men are sometimes choked with their own plots. It was the proffer of ten thousand talents, wherewith Haman hoped, both to purchase his intended revenge, and the reputation of a worthy patriot. That sum is now laid in his dish, for a just argument of malicious corruption: for, well might Esther plead; 'If we Jews deserved death, what needed our slaughter to be bought out? and if we deserved it not, what horrible cruelty was it to set a price on innocent blood? It is not any offence of ours; it is only the despite of an enemy, that hath wrought our destruction.'

Besides, now it appears the king was abused by misinformation. The adversary suggested, that the life of the Jews could not stand with the king's profit; whereas their very bondage should be more damage to the state, than all Haman's worth could countervail. Truth may be smothered, but it cannot die: it may be disguised, but it will be known: it may be suppressed, but it will triumph.

But what shall we say to so harsh an aggravation? Could Esther have been silent in a case of decreed bondage, who is now so vehement in a case of death? Certainly, to a generous nature, death is far more easy than bondage: why would she have endured the greater, and

yet so abhors the less? Was it, for that the Jews were already too well inured to captivity; and those evils are more tolerable, wherewith we are acquainted? Or, was it, for that there may be hopes in bondage; none, in death? Surely, either of them were lamentable, and such as might deserve her humblest deprecation.

The queen was going on, to have said, 'But, alas! nothing will satisfy our bloody enemy, save the utter extirpation of me and my nation;' when the impatient rage of the king interrupts her sentence in the midst; and, as if he had heard too much already and could too easily supply the residue of her complaint, snatches the word out of her mouth, with a furious demand; 'Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?' It was the interest of queen Esther's person, that raised this storm in Ahasuerus. Set that aside, how quietly, how merrily, was the determined massacre of the Jews formerly digested! Actions have not the same face, when we look on them with contrary affections.

Now queen Esther musters up her inward forces; and, with an undaunted courage, fixing her angry eyes on that hated Agagite, she says, 'The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.' The word was loath to come forth, but it strikes home at the last.

Never, till now, did Haman hear his true title. Before, some had styled him, noble; others, great; some, magnificent; and some, perhaps, virtuous: only Esther gives him his own, 'wicked Haman.' Ill-deserving greatness doth in vain promise to itself a perpetuity of applause. If our ways be foul, the time shall come, when, after all vain flattery, after all our momentary glory, our sins shall be ripped up, and our iniquities laid before us, to our utter confusion.

With what consternation did Haman now stand! How do we think he looked, to hear himself thus enstyled, thus accused, yea, thus condemned? Certainly, death was in his face, and horror in every of his joints. No sense, no limb, knows his office. Fain would he speak, but his tongue falters, and his lips tremble. Fain would he make apologies on his knees, but his heart fails him; and tells him the evidence is too great, and the offence above all pardon. Only guiltiness and fear look through his eyes,

on the enraged countenance of his master; which now bodes nothing to him, but revenge and death.

In what a passionate distemper doth this banquet shut up! King Ahasuerus flies from the table, as if he had been hurried away with a tempest. His wrath is too great, to come forth at his mouth: only his eyes tell Haman, that he hates to see him, and vows to see his dispatch.

For solitariness, and not for pleasure, doth he now walk into his garden; and thinks with himself, 'What a monster have I favored! Is it possible, that so much cruelty and presumption should harbor in a breast, that I thought ingenuous? Could I be so bewitched, as to pass so bloody a decree? Is my credulity thus abused, by the treacherous subtlety of a miscreant, whom I trusted? I confess it was my weak rashness, to yield unto so prodigious a motion; but it was the villany of this Agagite, to circumvent me by false suggestions. He shall pay for my error. The world shall see, that, as I exceeded in grace, so I will not come short in justice. Haman, thy guilty blood shall expiate that innocent blood, which thy malice might have shed.'

In the mean time, Haman, so soon as ever he could recover the qualm of his astonishment, finding himself left alone with queen Esther, loseth no time, spareth no breath, to mitigate her anger, which had made way to his destruction. Doubtless, with many vows and tears and deferations, he labors to clear his intentions to her person; bewailing his danger, imploring her mercy, confessing the unjust extent of his malice, proffering endeavors of satisfaction: 'Wretched man that I am, I am condemned before I speak; and when I have spoken, I am condemned. On thy sentence, O queen, I see death awaits for me. In vain shall I seek to avoid it. It is thy will, that I should perish; but let that little breath I have left acquit me so far with thee, as to call heaven and earth to record, that, in regard of thee, I die innocent. It is true, that mine impetuous malice miscarried me against the nation of the Jews, for the sake of one stubborn offender; but did I know there was the least drop of Israelitish blood in thy sacred person? Could I suspect, that Mordecai or that people did aught concern thee? Let not one death be enough for me, if I would ever have enter-

tained any thought of evil against nation or man, that should have cost but a frown from thee. All the court of Persia can sufficiently witness, how I have magnified and adored thee, ever since the royal crown was set on thy head; neither did I ever fail to do thee all good offices unto that my sovereign master, whom thou hast now mortally incensed against me. O queen, no hand can save my life but thine, that hath as good as bereaved it. Show mercy to him, that never meant but loyalty to thee. As ever thou wouldest oblige an humble and faithful vassal to thee, as ever thou wouldest honor thy name and son with the praise of tender compassion, take pity on me; and spare that life, which shall be vowed to thy service: and whereas thy displeasure may justly allege against me that rancorous plot for the extirpation of that people, whom I, too late, know to be thine; let it suffice that I hate, I curse my own cruelty; and only on that condition shall beg the reprieval of my life, that I shall work and procure, by thy gracious aid, a full defeazance of that unjust execution. Oh, let fall on thy despairing servant one word of favor to my displeased master, that I may yet live.'

While he was speaking to this purpose, having prostrated himself, for the more humility, before the queen, and spread his arms in a vehement imploration up to her bed, the king comes in; and, as not unwilling to misconstrue the posture of him, whom he now hated, says, What, 'Will he force the queen also before me in the house?' That, which Haman meant as an humble suppliant, is interpreted as from a presumptuous offender. How oft might he have done so, and more, while he was in favor, uncensured! Actions are not the same, when the man alters. As charity makes a good sense of doubtful occurrents, so prejudice and displeasure take all things, though well meant, at the worst. It is an easy thing to pick a quarrel, where we intend a mischief.

'The wrath of the king is as a messenger of death.' While those words were yet in the mouth of Ahasuerus, Haman, in turning his head towards the king, is suddenly muffled for his execution. He shall no more see either face or sun: he shall be seen no more, but as a spectacle of shame and horror.

And now he thinks, 'Wo is me, whose eyes serve me only, to foresee the approach of a dishonorable and painful death! What am I the better to have been great? Oh, that I had never been! Oh, that I could not be! How too truly have Zeresh and my friends foretold me of this heavy destiny! Now am I ready to feel, what it is, that I means to thousands of innocents. I shall die with pain and ignominy. Oh, that the conscience of mine intended murder could die with me!'

It is no marvel, if wicked men find nothing but utter discomforts in their end. Rather than fail, their former happiness shall join with their imminent miseries, to torment them. It is the just judgment of God, that presumptuous sinners should be swallowed up of those evils, which they would not fear. Happy is that man, who hath grace to foresee and avoid those ways, which will lead him to a perfect confusion. Happy is he, that hath so lived, that he can either welcome death as a friend, or defy it as an enemy.

Who was ever the better for favor past? Those, that had before kissed the feet and smiled in the face of Haman, are now as ready to cover his head and help him to the gallows. Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, seasonably tells the king, how stately a gibbet Haman had newly set up, for well-deserving Mordecai, within his own palace. I hear not one man open his mouth, to intercede for the offender, to pacify the king, to excuse or lessen the fact. Every one is ready to pull him down, that is falling; to trample on him, that is down: yet, no doubt, there were some of these courtiers, whom Haman had obliged. Had the cause been better, thus it would have been. Every cur is ready to fall on the dog, that he sees worried. But here, it was the just hand of God, to set off all hearts from a man, that had been so unreasonably merciless; and to raise up enemies, even among friends, to him, that had professed enmity to God's church. So let thine enemies perish, O Lord, unsuccored, unpitied.

'Then the king said, Hang him thereon.' There can be no truer justice, than in retaliation. Who can complain of his own measure? 'Behold, the wicked travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen

into the ditch that he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.'

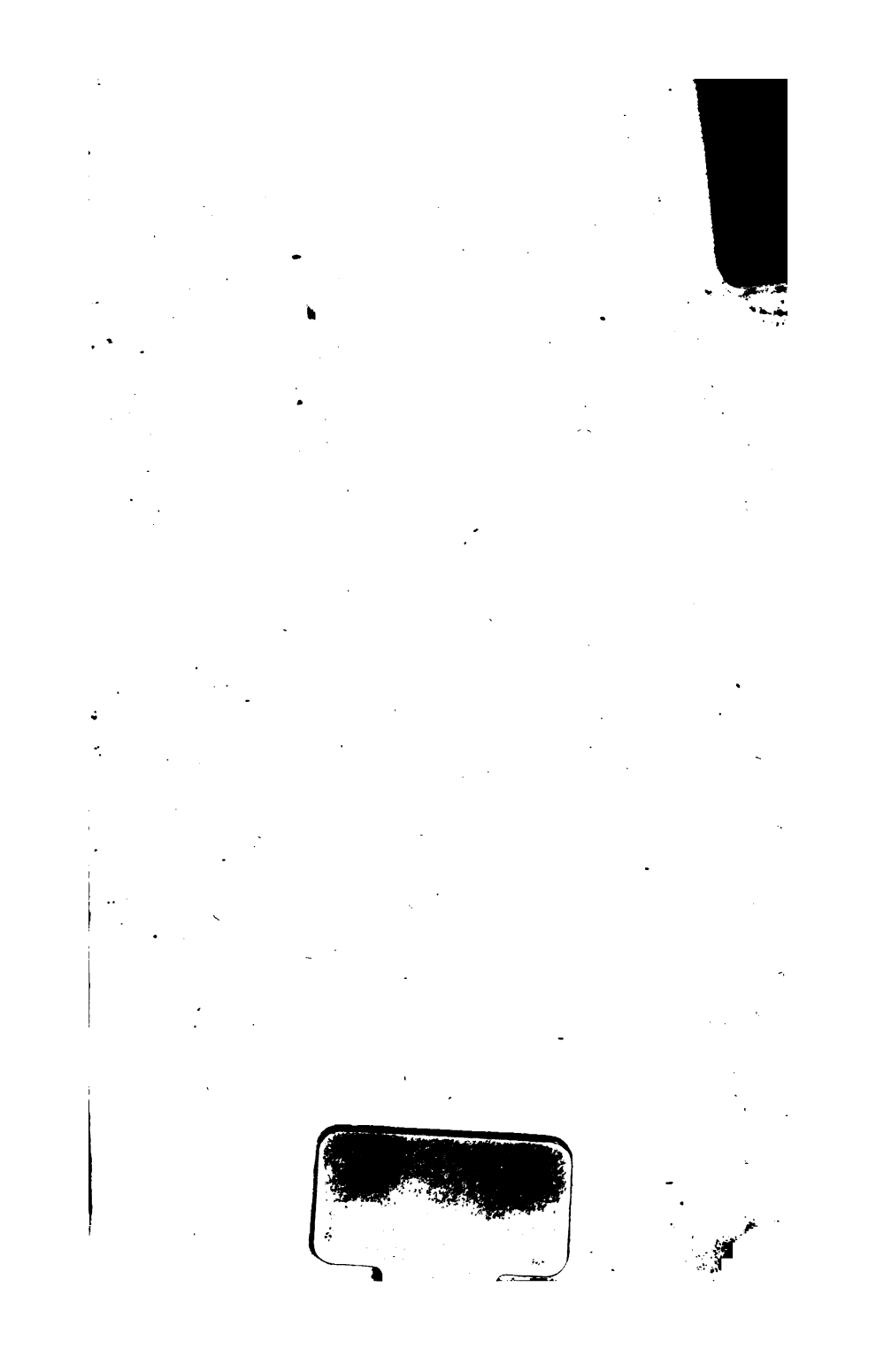
There hangs Haman, in more reproach, than ever he stood in honor; and Mordecai, who is now first known for what he was, succeeds his favor, and changes inheritances with his enemy; for while Haman inherits the gibbet of Mordecai, Mordecai inherits the house and honor of Haman. 'O Lord, let the malice of the wicked come to an end; but establish thou the just.'

One hour hath changed the face of the Persian court. What stability is there in earthly greatness? He, whom, in the morning, all knees bowed unto, as more than a man, now hangs up, like a despised vermin, for a prey to the ravens. He, who, this morning, was destined to the gallows, now rules over princes: neither was it for nothing, that he this day rode in triumph. The king's ring, that was taken from Haman, is now given to Mordecai, as the pledge of his authority; and he, that even now sat in the gate, is called up next to the throne. Wickedness and honest innocence have now paid their debts, to both their clients.

Little joy would it yet have been to Esther, that her enemy was dead, her kinsman advanced, if still her people must for all this expect their fatal day. Her next suit therefore is for the safety of her nation, in the countermand of that bloody decree, which Haman had obtained against them. That, which was surreptitiously gotten and rashly given, is so much more gladly reversed, by how much mercy is more pleasing to a good nature, than cruel injustice. Mordecai hath power to indite, seal, send out letters of favor to the Jews, which were causelessly sentenced to the slaughter. If a Persian law might not be reversed, yet it might be counterchanged. Mordecai may not write, 'Let no Jew be slain;' he may write, 'Let the Jews meet, and stand for their lives against those that would slay them.' This command flies after the former, so fast, as if it would overtake that, which it cannot recall. The Jews are revived with this happy tidings, that they may have protection, as well as enmity; that authority will not be their executioner; that their own hands are allowed to be their avengers.

Who would imagine, that, after public notice of this alteration at the court, when the world could not choose but know the malicious ground of that wrongful edict, the shameful death of the procurer, the power of the party opposite; any one should be found, throughout all the provinces, that would once lift up his hand against a Jew? that, with his own danger, would endeavor to execute a controlled decree? The church of God should cease to be itself, if it wanted malicious persecution. There needs no other quarrel, than the name, the religion of Israel.

Notwithstanding the known favor of the king and the patronage of Mordecai, the thirteenth of Adar is meant to be a bloody day. Haman hath too many abettors in the Persian dominions. These join together to perform that sentence, whereof the author repented. The Jews take heart to defend themselves; to kill their murderers. All the provinces are turned into a field of civil war; wherein innocence vanquisheth malice. The Jews are victors; and not only are alive, but are feared. The most resist them not; many assist them, and some become theirs. The countenance of the great leads the world at pleasure. Fear of authority sways thousands, that are not guilty of a conscience.

Yea, besides the liberty of defence, the Jews are now made their own justices. That there may be none left from the loins of that accursed Agagite, who would have left none of the Jewish seed, they slay the ten sons of Haman; and obtain new days of further executions. Neither can death satisfy their revenge. Those ten sons of Haman shall, in their very carcasses, bear the reproach of their father, and hang aloft on his gallows.

Finally, no man doth, no man dares, frown on a Jew. They are now become lords in the midst of their captivity. No marvel, if they ordain and celebrate their joyful Purim, for a perpetual memory, to all posterities, of their happy deliverance. It were pity, that the church of God should not have sunshines, as well as storms; and should not meet with interchanges of joy in their warfare, before they enter on the unchangeable joy of their endless triumph.—Esther vii. viii. ix.